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(HANSARD)

Tuesday, September 25, 2018

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, September 25, 2018

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1000)

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is truly an honour for me to stand today and present, in both official languages, the 19th report of the Standing Committee on Health entitled "Organ Donation in Canada". Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

We have made seven recommendations in the report, and every member in all parties has taken an interest in this report. Two of the members even have motions and bills coming up this week. I want to thank the members for their diligence on this most important report. I also want to thank the clerk and the analysts for their help.

Canada has a dismal record of organ donation, and we are hoping this report will help improve it. We are in the low third of developed countries in organ donation, and we have to do better. Hopefully, these seven recommendations in the report will have some impact.

We are thankful for the opportunity to present this report, and we look forward to a response from the government.

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JOBS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH ACT

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-414, An Act to amend the Jobs and Economic Growth Act (Canadian Nuclear Laboratories Ltd.).

He said: Mr. Speaker it is my pleasure to rise today to introduce this bill, which has to do with the pensions of over 3,000 Canadian nuclear workers and their families who, as a result of a decision to privatize the management of AECL assets, were kicked out of their pension after a three-year grace period on September 12.

This bill would, first of all, provide an extension of the grace period for the government to work towards a more lasting solution and give it time to look at other jurisdictions that have more flexible membership for their public service pension plan to allow these workers to continue to contribute to the pension that they signed up for when they started in the industry. The workers were told since the inception of the new government that there would be a fair and lasting solution until about six months ago when the tack changed, and then they were told that, because of the framework of the legislation, the government's hands were tied. However, this bill shows that the law can change, and I encourage the government to adopt these provisions forthwith to get fairness for these workers.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today.

The first is about the Canada summer jobs program. The petition states that section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms identifies freedom of conscience, thought and belief as fundamental freedoms.

The government must defend the rights of all Canadians, including those whose values are at odds with the Liberal government's. The petition calls on the government to stop imposing the values test on Canada summer jobs program applicants.

● (1005)

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition that I am presenting today has to do with the international trafficking of human organs. The petition mentions two bills, a private member's bill and a Senate bill.

The petitioners are calling on the House to support these bills and to protect those who may be vulnerable to the international trafficking of human organs.

[*English*]

IMMIGRATION

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by constituents from Dufferin—Caledon.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to encourage the Canadian government to work with the Government of Israel to facilitate the completion of sponsorship applications of asylum seekers from Africa so they can immigrate to Canada as soon as possible.

[*Translation*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am tabling petition E-1646.

The petitioners are speaking out against the fact that Toufik Benhamiche, a Canadian citizen and resident of Mascouche, has been held in detention in Cuba since July 7, 2017, because he was unfairly convicted and sentenced to four years in prison without parole for manslaughter. Despite the fact that the People's Supreme Court of Cuba overturned all of the criminal convictions and recognized that Mr. Benhamiche was the victim of a tainted judicial process on April 30, 2018, Cuban authorities are still refusing to allow Mr. Benhamiche to leave the country. Canadian consular authorities have not made any requests to this effect.

This petition, which is signed by 1,636 Canadians, calls on the Minister of Foreign Affairs to take the necessary steps to ensure that Mr. Benhamiche receives impartial, fair and equitable treatment and is returned to Canada as soon as possible.

[*English*]

EATING DISORDERS

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in support of a petition to the Government of Canada concerning a pan-Canadian strategy for eating disorders.

The petitioners call on the government to support Motion No. 117 to initiate discussions with the provinces and territories and with responsible stakeholders for a pan-Canadian strategy for eating disorders to include better prevention, diagnosis, treatment, support and research.

This issue is often linked to mental illness and workforce engagement.

I am pleased to support this petition.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too rise today to draw attention to the issue of international trafficking of human organs.

The people who have signed this petition are looking for the expedient adoption of Bill S-240.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to also present a petition on behalf of many Canadians who are increasingly concerned about the international trafficking in human organs removed from victims without consent. We are dealing with Bill C-350 and Bill S-240.

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—VETERANS

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC) moved:

That, given the Prime Minister has told veterans that they are "asking for more than we are able to give", the House call on the Minister of Veterans Affairs to revoke the Veterans Affairs Canada benefits that have been extended to Chris Garnier, who is not a veteran, is incarcerated for second-degree murder and for interfering with the dead body of police officer Catherine Campbell, and is currently receiving benefits for a disability he sustained while committing his heinous crimes.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

Twenty-nine days ago, veterans learned, and were quite rightly outraged at the news, that Christopher Garnier, a convicted murderer, was having his PTSD treatment paid out of funds set aside for veterans. Twenty-nine days ago we called on the Minister of Veterans Affairs to intervene and right this wrong.

At first, the minister and the minister's office stayed silent on the matter. Departmental spokesmen were sent out to speak instead. As it became obvious that the outrage was growing, the minister finally relented and issued a statement. He told veterans that he shared their outrage and told them that he would seek answers for them. All seemed well. Pressure had been applied and the government seemed to have heard and seemed to have been acting.

However, as of yesterday, 29 days later, veterans still have no answers and the minister can only say that he is waiting for his officials to provide him with a report. The minister's lack of action, quite frankly, has become more outrageous than the original decision to give veterans benefits to this murderer.

Therefore, we did what we do in these situations. We appealed to a higher authority, in this case the Prime Minister. We asked him if he believed that Chris Garner deserved the veterans benefits he is receiving. The Prime Minister was not even willing to answer that simple question.

The Prime Minister and his Minister of Veterans Affairs have failed to address this issue and failed to provide veterans the answer they deserve. Here we are today, 29 days later, forcing a vote on whether or not to do the right thing and revoke these veterans benefits being wrongly extended to a murderer. It is shameful that it has taken this long for the government to make a decision on such a straightforward matter. Then again, veterans will say that under this government, waiting far too long for answers has become the name of the game.

Even the veterans ombudsman will say this. In fact, he slammed the Liberal government in a report just a few weeks ago, showing quite clearly that injured veterans are being forced to wait months longer than promised to find out if they even qualify for benefits. It frustrates veterans to know that, while the government makes them sit and wait for answers, a convicted murderer who has not served a day in his life in the military is having his private treatment paid for with funds set aside for veterans, private treatment for a disability he developed strangling Officer Catherine Campbell, putting her body in a compost bin and dumping her under a bridge.

Can my colleagues imagine what veterans are thinking? In fact, can my colleagues imagine what Canadians are thinking? Veterans who have served this nation honourably are being made to wait an average of seven months for a decision, many of them dealing with PTSD issues. Some are waiting much longer for benefits that they have earned. Veterans cannot even get an update on the status of their own claims.

Today, we will be forcing the government and all Liberal MPs to make a decision on whether they believe Chris Garnier should continue to receive benefits meant for veterans or if they believe that the minister and the Prime Minister should revoke them.

● (1010)

Today, I am fully expecting that members on the government side will claim that our side is advocating for changes, reductions, and revisions to the family benefits. If they do, this is a clear act that we are on the right track, because it is a desperate argument. We have no intention of touching veterans benefits now or in the future. This is a one-off situation. It is something which the policy-makers likely never anticipated when they wrote the policy to extend benefits. When mass murderer Clifford Olson was in prison and receiving OAS benefits, they were revoked when we were in power. They were revoked because the then prime minister had the leadership skills to know it was wrong. He had the management skills to pull into a room the key people who made the decision to extend those benefits. He said in the House of Commons that he personally would take all action necessary to have the benefits revoked, even if it meant bringing legislation to the floor of the House.

Clearly, this is a one-off situation. It is not about the extension of family benefits, which are very important to many veterans and their family members. This is about a 30-year-old individual who never served one day of his life in a military uniform, yet Catherine Campbell, the person he murdered, wore two uniforms. She wore the uniform of a police officer and she was a volunteer firefighter.

Today, as we consider the motion and bring it to a vote, make no mistake, this is about the failure of leadership of both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Veterans Affairs. It is about their lack of ability to bring the decision-makers, those who made this outrageous decision in the confines of the walls of Veterans Affairs Canada to extend benefits, to the table quickly and to get an explanation from them. That is what one normally would do in the course of managing any organization or business. One would call the decision-makers to the table and say, "Explain this to me".

If the minister is as outraged as he has said he is, why would he not do that as the first step? Why would he not travel to Charlottetown, where the offices of Veterans Affairs Canada are, sit in a meeting room with his senior officials and management people and ask what is going on. He could then come back to the House of Commons and answer to veterans and Canadians why this outrageous situation was allowed to happen in the first place. He could make a determination and have the backbone and leadership to answer the questions in the House, which the Liberals have been unable and refuse to do. It is truly shameful not only to the veterans it disrespects but the people of Canada in general.

This is an issue that needs resolution. The Liberals can intervene. They can do it, and they are refusing to do it. Instead, they are defending this individual getting these benefits. I trust my colleagues in the government backbenches will make the right decision today to get their leadership to correct this one-off situation.

● (1015)

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I find it rich coming from the member for Brantford—Brant, who was actually in the Conservative government when it had the decade of darkness, when it cut back. I would like to remind him. Has he forgotten the seven Conservative attacks on Canada's veterans? Conservatives killed the lifetime pension for veterans. Harper's minister insulted veterans. He closed nine veterans offices. The auditor general found the Harper government was failing veterans. The Conservatives slashed 900 jobs. Also, despite the pleas of managers, they silenced and smeared veterans, and released their medical records.

Now the member has the gall to stand up here and accuse us of not doing enough. We have been defending veterans and working to right the wrongs the Conservatives did for over 10 years. As a former serving member of the Canadian Armed Forces, I can say it was a decade of darkness.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Madam Speaker, that is absolutely false.

As expected, that was totally off topic and did not address the one-off case which today's motion proposes to resolve. I respect the member of Parliament for his service to our country, as I do all veterans. Let me clarify for him that on the lifetime pension issue, it was the Liberal government that brought in the new veterans charter which did away with the previous lifetime pension. It was not our government. We implemented what the previous government had put in place.

I can say this. We did not cut off the lifetime pension for veterans. We worked with veterans through the early stages of the new veterans charter, which is a living document, and was always intended to be, to work toward giving veterans the benefits they need.

● (1020)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, when we are talking about veterans and their benefits, we need to have a full conversation. I wonder why my colleague from the Conservative Party has brought forward this one case without talking about the overall approach of what veterans need today.

He has not talked about the lapsed spending of the current government of over $370 million that has not been spent on veterans but was promised to veterans. He has not talked about the wait times that veterans are suffering right now, which are growing, or the scathing report from the veterans affairs ombudsman that came out last week. He has not touched on any of these issues and how we are going to fix them.

I would like to hear from my colleague from the Conservative Party about how to address these issues. When we are talking about veterans benefits, we have to have a full conversation. Veterans deserve it. They expect us to work collectively together to address their concerns, to plug the gaps, and make sure that they are not falling through the cracks.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Madam Speaker, let me assure my hon. colleague that day in and day out in this House and at committee, we are called upon to hold the government to account on all of the issues that he brought under the umbrella of the management of the Minister of Veterans Affairs. On all of these files, the minister is frankly failing in the job of overseeing and managing all of these issues.

We have selected one issue today. We have asked questions over and over again in this House about unspent money that sits there while veterans wait an average of seven months to find out if their claim is even going to be covered. Many of them spend more than a year waiting, with no response whatsoever from the ministry. There are many issues, as he mentioned.

I totally am on side and agree with the member. We need to hold the government to account for all the failures to veterans, and there are many. The Prime Minister has made many promises to them and has not delivered. Many veterans are absolutely mystified as to why we have this situation today where we have to put a laser focus on this issue. It is a lack of leadership.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Madam Speaker, we are here today in the seat of Canadian democracy, a place of free, safe and peaceful debate thanks to honourable men and women who have maintained peace and security during troubled times. Even as we speak, Canadian Forces personnel are keeping us safe across the country and around the world.

At this very moment, Canadian Armed Forces personnel are deployed far from their country, their loved ones and their homes. They are defending our nation's values of freedom and democracy. Some have been assigned dangerous missions, while others are providing desperately needed help to extremely vulnerable people. While many are maintaining peace and order, others are in training at locations all over Canada.

We have every reason to be proud of their work. I think it is safe to say that Canadians are proud of our Canadian Armed Forces. People in my riding, Richmond—Arthabaska, feel a deep sense of connection to members of our Royal Canadian Legion branches in places like Victoriaville, Richmond and Danville. We have tremendous respect for them, and I know they give so much back to the community.

All of this brings the following question to mind: why are we so proud of our soldiers and veterans in Canada? The answer is simple: because they look out for us, following a strict code of honour and showing dedication and loyalty at all times, while risking their own lives. They are proud to wear the maple leaf on their uniform everywhere in the globe, because the rights and freedoms we have in Canada are the envy of the world.

Although we may not personally know these men and women in uniform, we do know that we can count on them. This bond of trust is strong and genuine. In return, we have a duty to recognize our soldiers and veterans. The government must treat them and their families with respect and dignity. The government must provide them with support and assistance as long as they behave honourably.

Honour is very important, especially to those who serve or have served Canada. A single dishonourable act is justification for a soldier, veteran or family member to lose those privileges. Imagine, then, how our soldiers and former military personnel must feel when they hear this terrible story.

Please allow me to tell it.

In September 2015, in Halifax, Christopher Garnier, a 30-year-old civilian, cravenly took the life of Catherine Campbell of Truro, Nova Scotia. He was convicted of second-degree murder in 2017 and sentenced to life in prison. Christopher Garnier never served a day in the Canadian Armed Forces. An expert at trial testified that Garnier developed post-traumatic stress disorder as a direct result of having strangled Ms. Campbell, put her body in a compost bin, and dumped her under a bridge.

However, as the son of a veteran, he qualified for support from Veterans Affairs Canada, which is still paying for his treatment for PTSD caused by the murder he committed. While behind bars, he is receiving treatment from a private psychologist funded through benefits intended for Canadian veterans, despite never having served our country. However, he would have access to similar support through the existing Canadian justice system.

The government is taking funds intended for our soldiers and veterans and using them to support a murderer. The family is outraged. Veterans are appalled. While some veterans are being forced to fight their government to access the services they are entitled to, a criminal is exploiting the system and the government is looking the other way.

Despite this atrocity, the Liberal government continues to support him financially. There is only one way out of this mess: immediately stop paying for this criminal's treatment under the veterans program.

● (1025)

The government must stop helping this murderer with money that is intended for our country's truly honourable men and women. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Veterans Affairs unfortunately do not want to talk about this case. They claim that the opposition should not be bringing up this issue in this political arena. On the contrary, I would say that it is our duty to talk about this tragedy in this chamber. It is a matter of respect, principle and honour.

We must break the silence in honour of the victim, her family, our men and women in uniform, and our veterans, who have been enraged by the government's decision. This is the opposition's role. We must denounce this foolish policy, which is yet another dismal Liberal failure, on top of all of their other failures. This is not the first time that the Prime Minister has treated our soldiers, our veterans, and their families unfairly. The current government broke its promise to no longer go to court against our soldiers and veterans. This government has spent millions of dollars in legal fees so far fighting them in court.

Members will recall that veteran in Alberta, whom the Prime Minister ridiculed at a town hall meeting when he said that veterans are asking for more than the government is able to give. This is the same government that did not hesitate to pay millions of dollars to Omar Khadr. This is the same government that has a policy to reintegrate Canadians who renounced our country to join ISIS. These traitors fought against our own Canadian soldiers. For what reason? What is the idea behind the Liberals' reintegration policy? Is the government truly weighing the risks and consequences of its actions?

What are we to make of the $200 million in the Minister of Veterans Affairs' budget, for just last year, which is still sitting in the government's coffers, instead of being used to support our veterans? So many questions, so few answers.

The Conservatives never hesitated to act swiftly on cases like this. In 2010, when we found out that serial killer Clifford Olson was getting old age security, we immediately took steps to end the payments. When we asked the Prime Minister whether he believed that a criminal found guilty of killing a police officer should be getting benefits from the Minister of Veterans Affairs, the Prime Minister did not answer. The Minister of Veterans Affairs has the authority and the power to cut off payments to this murderer, who is not a veteran, but he is using privacy as an excuse. He does not want to share any information. For the record, the opposition is not asking for information. All we want is action.

The Prime Minister and his government would do well to learn from our soldiers and veterans instead of attacking them. They could learn from veterans' loyalty, respect, discipline, devotion and, above all, their code of honour. Those who serve Canada honourably deserve better. The Campbell family deserves better. Canadians deserve better. This government has to right this wrong immediately. Enough with this scandalous injustice.

The Conservatives are calling on the Minister of Veterans Affairs to intervene, to stand up and address this outrageous injustice. If he does not, then we will, when we return to power in 2019.

● (1030)

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I greatly appreciated my colleague's speech, but let me remind hon. members that in 2014, General Rick Hillier, the former chief of defence staff, spoke about suicide.

[*English*]

I quote from an article:

> "I do not think we had any idea the scale and scope of what the impact would be. I truly do not. This is beyond a medical issue. I think many of our young men and women have lost confidence in our country to support them."

The article goes on to say:

> Why would they not, given the callousness of the Harper government? In the past decade Conservatives closed offices, cut 900 jobs, clawed back benefits, killed lifetime pensions for Afghanistan veterans, and failed to spend $1.13 billion of the Veterans Affairs budget but found money to increase advertising and ceremonies for politicians to honour veterans.

Is this member suggesting the Harper government did an excellent job for veterans?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Madam Speaker, I do not know if my colleague realizes that it will soon be three years since they took office. It is time to stop pointing fingers at the previous government. The Liberals are in power. They are the ones who can make decisions. They are quick enough to make decisions when they are playing politics and helping their friends.

There is currently a civilian criminal who has never served in the Canadian Armed Forces. All we are asking is for the government to do the right thing, show respect for them, and put an end to this injustice. It is not complicated. I think it is just common sense. The people listening are intelligent and can figure it out. We are simply asking the government to put an end to this injustice. It is simple to understand and simple to do, and we are waiting for the government to take action and fix this.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is obvious that Veterans Affairs could make better use of its funding to provide veterans with services.

The most recent ombudsman's report indicates that francophone female veterans have the most difficulty obtaining services.

I would like to know if my colleague has any suggestions about how to improve services provided to these women.

● (1035)

Mr. Alain Rayes: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her very relevant question. Yes, we can do better. All governments, regardless of their party, should be working to help our veterans and members of the Canadian Armed Forces. If either of those groups is not getting the help that they need, whatever it may be, we in this House should be doing everything in our power to help them.

That being said, I would like to come back to the matter of the official opposition motion. Will the government put an end to this injustice? Let us at least address the problems. As people often say, the first step in fixing a problem is recognizing that there is one. What we are seeing today is that the Liberal government, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Veterans Affairs do not seem to want to see the truth, admit that a mistake was made, and immediately fix it.

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would advise members on the other side that all of us became concerned when we heard about this. I believe the minister has said that the government is not going to be talking about the specific case, but that it is looking into the matter. I believe this happened about three weeks ago or so.

My colleague mentioned that the Conservatives took steps in the Clifford Olson case. The Olson information was released in March, and the steps were taken in June, which is three months. We have had about three weeks.

I wonder if the member could give us time to consider what steps we need to take in this matter.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska has time for a quick answer.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to provide a simple answer. It would be nice if the government at least had the courage to say that it is going to remedy the problem, that this is an injustice, and that it is going to take immediate action, rather than hiding behind privacy and confidentiality when this story is well known and is all over the news.

We are aware that administrative procedures take time. That being said, all we are asking the government to do is to stand up, show some leadership, and say that this is an injustice that it is going to address immediately, as quickly and promptly as possible.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I did not want to interrupt the proceedings earlier, but there has been some going back and forth, interrupting members while they are talking. It has happened on both sides.

I know this is a very passionate issue and there are differing opinions. We may not like what we hear on one side or the other side, but we have to respect the House and those who are speaking. Therefore, I would appreciate it if before interrupting the proceedings, members would wait until questions and comments or until it is their turn to make a speech.

Resuming debate, the hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to rise in the House today to speak to this motion and our recent efforts to ensure veterans and their families receive the respect, support, care and economic opportunities they deserve as they transition to a post-military life.

While much has been said in the past few days, the fact remains that our government has placed the highest priority on making sure veterans and their families have the support and services they need, when they need them.

Our government also places that same priority on the privacy of Canada's veterans' personal information, which prevents us from discussing specific cases. When it comes to Canada's veterans and their families, we are not in the business of political opportunism. We are interested in getting veterans well again.

We can and should, however, look at everything our government has done in the last three years to improve benefits and services, not only for our nation's veterans but also for their families. We know that when a man or woman serves in the Canadian Armed Forces, their whole family serves with them.

● (1040)

[*Translation*]

Veterans Affairs Canada is a different department today than it was three years ago. It is driven by a new vision, with a focus on the well-being and successful transition of our Canadian Armed Forces and RCMP members, veterans and families.

[*English*]

It is this vision that saw us reopen the nine Veterans Affairs offices that were closed by the previous Conservative government, open a new one in Surrey and increase outreach into the north. It is this vision that saw us staff up and hire more than 470 employees after years of cuts. It is this vision that saw us bring benefits in line with where they should have been years ago.

Year over year, our government has committed more money to veterans programs and benefits, ensuring more and better support for veterans and their families, based on feedback directly from them. Their feedback has led to investments of $10 billion since 2016. Ten billion is a big number, a bigger number than most of us can really picture. I will explain in a little more depth how that number translates into the programs, services and benefits that our veterans now have access to every day.

First, I want to address an issue that has recently been brought up, which is lapsed funding. Over the past three years, Veterans Affairs Canada has seen a significant increase in demand for its programs and services, and that is a good thing. It means veterans are coming forward and getting the help they need. It means they are beginning to trust their government again. I am sure that is not easy to do after 10 years of distrust in the previous government.

In order to respond to this increased demand, the department has to request additional funds in the middle of the year. As many of my colleagues in the House are aware, these are the supplements. The department goes and asks Treasury Board for more money, because we have more veterans who want more of the programs and services they are entitled to, indeed, that they deserve.

Our services are demand-driven, so whether it is 10 or 10,000 veterans coming forward, they will receive those services. Instead of going back every day when we see another veteran come forward, the department estimates how many people will access benefits and how much money is needed. It is not an exact science, though.

This process guarantees that whether a veteran comes forward this year, next year or the year after that, we will always have resources available for veterans and their families to access programs and services.

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, on a point of order. I would ask that the minister talk about the relevance of the motion before us today, which is about Chris Garnier, a man who killed a police officer, a man who is not a veteran. That is what the motion is. It is not at all about what he thinks he is doing on behalf of veterans. It is about this individual and how he is getting veterans benefits.

The minister should get back on track and talk about the subject matter at hand.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I appreciate the member's comments. As the member knows, there is some latitude as to responses and speeches. I also want to remind the minister that it has to have some relevance to the opposition day motion. Therefore, I would ask the minister to make sure that there will be relevance there.

The hon. minister may continue.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Madam Speaker, as I was saying, this process does not guarantee that whether a veteran comes forward this year or the next or the year after that, we will always have resources available for veterans and their families to access programs and services. Lapsed funding does not result in anyone receiving less than they should.

Year over year, we have seen more financial compensation go to veterans and their families than in years previous, certainly in the previous 10 years. We have seen more veterans avail themselves of programs and services, and we have definitely seen more support being given to veterans than what the Conservatives failed to do in a decade.

I bring up the previous government because we know that they too had lapsed funding. This is not a new accounting method. It is how departments budget, but when we look at the Conservatives' record, when we look at the cuts in their Veterans Affairs departmental budgets, the cuts of 1,000 staff at Veterans Affairs and the closure of Veterans Affairs offices, it is a very different picture, one that veterans and Canadians see through.

I would like to dig in a little more on these benefits. Since January, I have held 41 town halls and round tables to meet with and hear from veterans, their families and stakeholders, and one thing I heard repeatedly was that veterans and their families needed better support and that change was needed. While there has been a lot of change at Veterans Affairs, my commitment to veterans and their well-being has remained the same. I am committed to ensuring that veterans' overall well-being is what drives everything we do. We want to make sure that veterans have purpose and are financially secure, safely housed, in good physical and mental health, resilient in the face of change, well integrated in the community, proud of their legacy and protected from political expediency.

When we look at these factors, we can all agree that without financial security, it is hard to focus on anything. That is why last December, we announced our plan to bring back a pension for life for ill and injured veterans. With that return of a monthly pension, the pension for life recognizes and compensates veterans for disabilities resulting from a service-related illness or injury with a combination of benefits that provide recognition, income support and stability.

● (1045)

[*Translation*]

Pain and suffering compensation is one of the main benefits. It is a monthly, tax-free payment for life that recognizes veterans' service-related pain and suffering.

This compensation is paid to members and veterans with a disability resulting from a service-related injury or illness.

Veterans and members can choose to receive either monthly payments or a lump sum, giving them the flexibility to choose what works for them and their families.

[*English*]

As well, additional support will be available for those with severe and permanent impairments causing a barrier to re-establishment and post-service life through the additional pain and suffering compensation. This will be provided as a monthly, tax-free benefit for life.

On top of that, the income-replacement benefit is a monthly program that will replace six current benefits and provide income support for those facing barriers to re-establishment. Additionally, veterans using this benefit will be able to earn up to $20,000 per year before any reduction to their IRB payment, and that benefit is 90% of their pre-release salary, which keeps up with inflation and includes a salary increase every year for 20 years to match their expected career progression.

Set to come into force on April 1, 2019, the new pension for life combines what veterans have asked for with the most up-to-date research and understanding of a veteran's well-being, but more importantly, the pension for life will become an integral part of that comprehensive approach to veterans' well-being, reinforcing all the programs and services available at VAC, of which mental health is a priority.

Another issue surrounding mental health we have talked about recently in this House is psychiatric service dogs. Some veterans have made it clear that service dogs could be beneficial for them if they are suffering with conditions like PTSD. That is why, earlier this year, we expanded the medical expense tax credit to recognize the costs for these service animals.

The department also invested in a pilot study to explore the use of service dogs as a safe and effective support for veterans with PTSD. As was reported last week, this study was recently completed, the department is reviewing its results and the final report will help to inform policy decisions related to service dogs.

We know that military service creates unique stressors for serving members and their families, both during and after service. Veterans Affairs Canada has concrete measures in place to address mental health, including the joint suicide prevention strategy. Announced last fall, the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs committed to a coordinated collaborative approach and identified over 160 initiatives dedicated to saving the lives of veterans and Canadian Armed Forces members. One suicide is too many, and with the two departments working together, we will be better able to help military service members and veterans reduce the risk, build resilience and prevent suicide.

Because families play an important role in a veteran's life, we recognize that they are there from day one. From base to base, from day to day, they bear intimate witness to the mental health struggles that some veterans deal with. That is why sometimes it could be determined by Veterans Affairs staff and medical professionals that access for a veteran's family members to counselling and other services would assist him or her better in achieving rehabilitation. Veterans Affairs staff consult and act on the recommendations of mental health professionals from across the country. The department has a nationwide network now of over 4,000 mental health professional who deliver services to veterans and RCMP and Canadian Forces members who have post-traumatic stress disorder and other operational stress injuries. Veterans and family members can also find mental health information, support and resources at the 11 operational stress injury clinics and eight satellite clinics across the country plus use of telehealth services, for those living in remote areas.

It is fundamental that we continue to learn and share best practices. Our government recently launched a centre of excellence on PTSD and related mental health conditions that will allow us to do just that. Announced in May with the Royal Ottawa Hospital, this centre will create and share knowledge on veterans mental health treatments that work and place that information directly in the hands of mental health professionals and others working with veterans on a daily basis.

While mental health is a critical factor in a veteran's overall well-being, the department's vision aims to address all aspects of wellness. That is what led to the new and enhanced benefits that rolled out on April 1 of this year. Addressing families and well-being, financial security and education and training, all were designed with a veteran's well-being in mind. One of those new initiatives is the veterans emergency fund. Veterans or family members who may find themselves in an emergency situation can now apply for those funds 24/7, because as we know, emergencies do not only happen nine to five, Monday to Friday. Another is the caregiver recognition benefit, which provides a veteran's caregiver with $1,000 a month, tax free, recognizing the invaluable role caregivers play in caring for veterans.

Two other new programs that launched this year and are proving to be very successful are the education and training benefit and the career transition service. So far, more than 1,400 veterans have been approved for funding to further their education, and more than 900 Canadian Forces members and veterans have been approved for career transition services, and it has only been five months.

These are just a few of the real differences we are making in the lives of our country's veterans.

● (1050)

[*Translation*]

Whether having served in the Second World War, the Korean War, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Cyprus or any other mission Canada has supported, every veteran has his or her own story based on his or her service, combat experience or injury.

[*English*]

Veterans' needs and the needs of their families and caregivers have evolved. They will continue to evolve, and we will evolve to meet them. Our government will continue to ensure that we are meeting their needs, enhancing their well-being, and helping them to successfully re-establish their lives after service.

Before I conclude, I would like to directly address the motion that has brought us here. As I have said previously in the House, I have instructed my department to look into this particular case and how this decision was made. I have reviewed the department's findings on this issue, and I am directing it to first, ensure that the services being received by a family member of a veteran are related to the veteran's service-related illness or injury, and where they are not, that the case be reviewed by a senior official before a decision is rendered. Second, I have requested that the department address its policy in providing treatment to family members who have extenuating circumstances, such as a conviction for a serious crime.

From now on, in cases with extenuating circumstances, the decision to extend treatment to a non-veteran family member must be made by an area director in consultation with our departmental health professionals.

● (1055)

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Madam Speaker, the great majority of what the minister has said today did not address the situation. He chose to address it at the end of his speech. From the report he received, he has decided to hand this decision off to someone else. He has decided that someone other than him should make the decision.

I want to refer to the comment my colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek made about the Clifford Olson case. When this was discovered, and these are unusual circumstances, just as the minister has reflected in his instructions to his bureaucrats, the former prime minister said, "I have instructed the minister to look at what options are available to us to rectify the situation because it should be rectified."

An hon. member: Immediately.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Immediately, Madam Speaker. It took legislation, and that is why the period of time happened. He painted a different canvas than that.

In this case, if the minister is not willing to take immediate action on this wrong, and I believe that many of his colleagues in the House know this is wrong, I would ask him to consider resigning from his position.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Far from it, Madam Speaker. I will stand by that veteran. I will stand by that veteran's right to privacy. This is not a case of protecting a murderer. This is a case of protecting a veteran.

The reason I took the time and trouble to spell out what this government has been doing over the past three years is that with each and every dollar of that $10 billion, we are protecting the lives of veterans and their families, even when it is unpopular to do so.

This is the most extenuating of circumstances. I have stood in the House on several occasions and said I was outraged. Everyone in the House has a right to be outraged. Every Canadian who feels outraged should be, but I will defend the veteran at the centre of this case. I will defend his privacy. I will not play fast and loose with the privacy of veterans, as that side of the House has done, as that side of the House has apologized for in the past. I will stand with veterans with every dollar we have passed in the House.

I invite members on all sides of the House to look at every member who was in the previous government during 10 years and ask where they were when we saw cut after cut to benefits, to services, to staff and to the department. Ask them where they were.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, we just heard from the government. Liberal members are patting themselves on the back for what they think are all the great things they are doing. However, at the same time, veterans are falling through the cracks.

We just heard from the veterans ombudsman that the backlog is growing. It grew 50% last year, and we have just learned that in June, it grew another 10%. The ombudsman's report says it is getting worse. Veterans are not getting the services they need. The department is only meeting one-third of its own service requirements.

While the Liberals are patting themselves on the back, we have learned about lapsed spending through a question on the order paper the NDP put forward. Over $370 million has not been spent. The minister likens it to being at the gas pump and a credit for the future. Tell veterans who have been waiting for over six months for their claims to be opened that it is like $5, $10 or $20 spent at the gas pump. It is $370 million plus.

Will the minister do the right thing and hire all the staff that were fired by the Conservatives, all 1,000 staff, and get them back to work and end the backlog once and for all?

● (1100)

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to talk about the ombudsman's report.

The ombudsman's report was based on data that led up to, but did not include, our very first initiatives as a government, believe it or not. It went right up to April 2016. It was in that budget that we had our first measures to deal with the backlog and our first new benefits and services came into force. In fact, it was outdated data. However, I take the member's point, and I in no way want to stand here and pat ourselves on the back. We have a lot of work to do.

However, so much damage was done in 10 years, it is ironic for people on this side of the House. I liken it to coming home and finding that one's house has been vandalized, and when one starts to clean up the mess, the vandals themselves come over to say that it is not being cleaned up fast enough. It is a little rich, but we are hard at it.

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Conservatives are very quick to the gun: Take action now and think later. The minister has power. The Harper-Scheer Conservatives used that administrative power to silence vets and their families.

When Sean Bruyea spoke out against legislation to strip veterans of lifetime pensions, he never imagined the government would try to smear his reputation using his own medical records. The Harper government was later forced to apologize for its actions, but it is just one example of that government's attempts to silence and discredit the veterans and their families who are standing up for their rights. They did this time and time again. Michel Drapeau, retired colonel, said that the government's actions were "despicable. It's dishonourable. It's unethical. And also illegal."

It is incredible, because it is not only the veterans who are at the centre of what we are talking about, but also the services to their families, because the families are at the centre of military life. Without their family, the military member could do nothing. He could not be deployed because he would know that his children and spouse were not being looked after at home.

We need to ensure that those services are available all the time to all of those families, and not use administrative powers unethically as the Conservatives did to remove those services.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his observations.

I will once again tell the House that it has been frustrating to attend 40-plus town halls to talk to veterans each and every day and to their families. It will take a long time to win their trust back.

Like any other member on this side of the House, I do not like to stand up and continually blame the other side of the House for what we need to do, but it is very important that Canadians and veterans understand what we are dealing with. Most veterans get it. Most veterans understand.

We will do what needs to be done, and we will stand by veterans and their families, even when it is not politically expedient to do so.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, because the minister beat around the bush and did not get to the point during his speech, I will get to the point directly with him.

Does the minister personally believe that it is wrong for a convicted cop killer who is not a veteran himself to receive veterans benefits, or am I simply asking for more than the minister can give right now?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Madam Speaker, I would say that my outrage should not weigh in this. I will stand by and protect the veteran at the centre of this. Even in this most extenuating of circumstances when the son has committed such an egregious crime, I will stand by that veteran's right to privacy. To talk about the psychiatric assessments of any member of any family of any veteran is, by extension, to talk about that veteran's well-being and right to privacy. I will not do that. I refuse to do that.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise today as a spokesperson for the federal NDP. I will be splitting my time with the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

First, let me start by saying that what happened to officer Catherine Campbell is absolutely shocking and heartbreaking. The pain to her family is unimaginable, and we must make sure this does not happen again. On behalf of all New Democrats, we send our condolences to her family.

The revelations regarding this case came as a shock to me, as they did to all veterans and their families and, obviously, to other members of this place and the Minister of Veterans Affairs and his department. It never should have happened, and the minister needs to fix it.

If one asked New Democrats how we have dealt with this highly unusual and outrageous case, I would note that I wrote a two-page letter to the minister on September 10 designed to make him aware of the media reports about the case and to ask him specific and pointed questions that came to me after reading the reports. I asked the minister three specific questions: was the decision to fund this care in accordance with any and all existing guidelines and/or regulations for the program and/or fund that was accessed; was the provision of care for illness unrelated to the service of veteran standard practice, and if so, what limitations are in place for such funding and provisions; and is funding still available to veterans in need of similar services from the same program and/or fund?

That said, in that letter, I let the minister know that I would be asking the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs to examine the regulations for this and other programs so they can be improved to ensure that all veterans and their families have access. To date, I have not heard back from the minister, but I await his thoughtful response before taking any further steps. New Democrats asked the government pointed questions in writing so we could find out what went wrong in this particular matter and, of course, work toward a solution to fix it.

Whenever we are talking about veterans benefits, we must discuss the challenges, the needs of veterans, and must have a wholesome conversation. All parties have expressed a desire to show respect and to help veterans and their families, but clearly we know that while the Conservatives were in government, they did not respect veterans. They cut services for veterans. Now the Liberals are making promises to fix the mistakes and are failing to do so.

Let us us not forget the way veterans were treated under the Conservative government, which cut more than 1,000 caseworkers and staff whose jobs were to work directly with veterans to ensure that they had access to the programs and services they needed, as well as the follow up they needed. It closed nine Veterans Affairs offices that served more than 20,000 veterans. There was also the failure of the Conservative government to spend more than $1.1 billion approved by Parliament to help veterans.

However, it does not excuse the Liberal government's broken promises today and for its following in the footsteps of the Conservatives on so many issues facing veterans today. While money has been allocated to help veterans under the Liberal government, something my NDP colleagues and I wholeheartedly support, it is not what the Liberals promised and is clearly not enough.

During the 2015 campaign, the Prime Minister promised to re-establish lifelong pensions, but instead his minister has put forward a pale imitation of the venerable old program. As has been pointed out by independent sources, the benefits paid out under the Liberals' new lifetime pension are not even close to the financial benefits veterans would have received under the old lifelong pension. I hope the government will stop misleading veterans about this fact.

While the government made a point of criticizing the last Conservative government for not spending $1.1 billion approved by Parliament over just seven years, it has continued the same practice, leaving over $374 million unspent in its first three years. For some reason, the minister likened this to getting a credit when one buys gas at the station. This is not five dollars, $10 or $15 left at the pump; this is enough money to hire back the over 1,000 caseworkers who were fired by the Conservative government and who could help deal with the growing backlog of over 30,000 veterans waiting for their disability benefit application claims to be opened. Many of them are not even getting a response.

● (1105)

With regard to the provision of service dogs that veterans absolutely need, they just got a report back from their own department, which veterans have been waiting for for years. The government chose to follow that path of doing its own report and ignoring a report that was done in the United States previously. It wanted to do a made in Canada report, but now the Liberals are deciding to wait for a report out of the U.S. before they allocate more resources for service dogs. A tax credit is great for service dogs. We appreciate that step forward, but veterans need more service dogs. More veterans are falling through the cracks, but the government did not do what it should have.

The Liberals could have used that money to open more centres to help veterans. We heard from the ombudsman's report that many veterans are waiting well beyond the service standards set out by the government. Most of them are waiting more than four months. They are actually waiting six months. Women are waiting longer than men. French Canadians are waiting longer than anglophone Canadians. Why? The Liberals are failing to address and meet their own service standards.

Many veterans cannot find someone to answer the phone. I have been hearing from constituents and others across the country. I have a note from Rose Doucette, a a former Canadian Armed Forces veteran who was deployed to Afghanistan and volunteered for an extended tour. She said she has had two claims in the VAC system since September 2017, that is, for over a year, and was recently told by a medical practitioner that the VAC wait time is now expected to be 24 to 28 weeks, but that even that was not likely. She was told that the new policy was never to discuss wait times with a veteran. She has also had four VAC reassessments waiting in the pipe since February 2018. VAC is not being truthful about its service to injured veterans. This is not how we should be treating our veterans.

I held five town halls in my riding this summer to listen to veterans. We heard someone say that the call centres are based on time zones that do not meet veterans' needs across the country and that people are not answering the phone. We heard from Vivian from Port Alberni who spoke about the application and appeals process impacting the families of veterans. She said that once a spouse gets through the system, they are sick themselves from dealing with it all.

Reg of Qualicum Beach also voiced his concerns regarding the long and convoluted process that generally requires multiple attempts.

Ken of Parksville expressed his desire for better communication with veterans when they submit an application or appeal. Confirmation and receipt with an approximate timeline would go a long way in addressing this issue for Ken. He is not even hearing back from VAC.

While the Liberals are patting themselves on the back, Ken, Vivian and Rose are all suffering, along with many other veterans across the country. Rick of Parksville summed up the feeling in the room. He compared it to medical insurance companies attempting to run out the clock on sick claimants to avoid paying them. We know that a lot of veterans will not get any benefits until their applications are approved. That means they are being left out and are leaning on family members to support them for the medications and treatment they need. This is absolutely unacceptable.

As New Democrats, we will continue to work in practical and meaningful ways to improve the lives of Canadian veterans and their families, because we think our veterans deserve no less from their political leaders. The huge problems that plague the current Liberal government and the Department of Veterans Affairs are a continuation of the Conservative legacy. All members ought to work together. We have to support veterans to make sure they get the services they are rightly owed and deserve.

● (1110)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for the hon. member and his passion toward veterans. We heard the minister talk about the fact that he was going to punt this issue down to mid-level bureaucrats for a decision. It is important to remind the minister that the Department of Veterans Affairs is a department of the Government of Canada. It is not his department and, as a result, punting this down and not acting on it calls into question whether he is abdicating his responsibility to the House with respect to his decision-making powers. If he does not want to make those types of decisions that we are asking for today, then he should resign.

Does the member not agree that this gentleman, Chris Garnier, should not be receiving benefits from Veterans Affairs given the circumstances of this case?

● (1115)

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, New Democrats have made it clear that this needs to be fixed. The minister needs to address this. We have made it unequivocally clear that this has to take place.

When it comes to Mr. Garnier, or anyone who has committed a crime, New Democrats wholeheartedly believe that when someone has committed a crime we need to do everything we can to rehabilitate that individual so when they are released from incarceration they come out a better person. That is something we are committed to. We believe Mr. Garnier should be getting services from Corrections Canada so that he gets help. Clearly, he needs help, but we believe it should not be coming from Veterans Affairs.

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Courtenay—Alberni not only for his speech today but for the tremendous, motivated work he does on the veterans committee.

Sitting in the same meetings, we have heard the same testimony with regard to backlog. My question relates to the millions that would be available to do other things. Those millions perhaps come from the backlog. The backlog, which we heard testimony about, comes from the fact that we are informing veterans of benefits they did not know they were eligible for. That has created new pressure on the staff. I would ask my colleague to comment on whether the backlog, as he understands it, is a result of better information going to veterans.

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question from my friend and colleague from Hamilton, with whom I sit on the veterans affairs committee. We work together, but I refute that statement. When the Conservatives fired 1,000 caseworkers, and the backlog has grown by over 60% in a year and a half, and we read the report from the ombudsman, it is not just about veterans learning about programs. The government is not fixing the backlog that was created by the Conservative cuts. The government is also failing to deal with essential services. We even heard from the bureaucracy, through a report straight to the minister, that it is having a hard time providing essential services for veterans. The government then goes out and announces program after program without properly and adequately resourcing the department to deliver those services.

The right thing for the government to do is to not leave over $370 million on the table, but to use that money not just to hire caseworkers to help deal with the backlog, but to hire them back permanently. Veterans deserve that. They need some certainty. People serving in the military who are set to leave need to know there is certainty in Veterans Affairs, that they are going to get the support and follow-up they deserve. Therefore, the right thing for the government to do is hire back those employees, then resource the department adequately for all the new programs it has announced and not leave any money on the table.

We do not buy it, leaving hundreds of millions of dollars on the table to go back to treasury. That money needs to be spent. If Veterans Affairs runs out of money, it can come back to Parliament and ask for supply to support it. I am certain the House would support that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to begin by extending my deepest condolences to Catherine Campbell's family. Ms. Campbell was the victim of a horrific crime, and I cannot imagine the pain her parents and loved ones must be feeling. I also want to tell the family that Catherine Campbell's name will not be forgotten.

This story reminds us of how much more work needs to be done to address violence against women. Ms. Campbell had gone through police training, but sadly, she is no longer with us.

It was very important for me to extend my condolences to Ms. Campbell's family and to let them know that she will be in my thoughts as I fight to end violence against women, with the support of the NDP and many MPs.

Regarding veterans' benefits, it is important to understand that there is a huge backlog and that the process is extremely long and complex. In many cases, soldiers with chronic back pain, to give an example, send in all their forms and benefit claims, only to be told that their injury is not related to their military service. They then have to fight to prove that the injury really is related to their military service. That is one of the reasons frequently cited for denying benefits.

We understand that privacy is required in the case of Chris Garnier. However, judging by the information we have received and the public statements that were made, including at trial, the injury for which he is receiving treatment is in no way connected to his father's military service. There is no connection between his injury and military service.

In my opinion, Veterans Affairs Canada should not be paying benefits in this case. Chris Garnier can get the care he needs from Corrections Canada, but Veterans Affairs Canada certainly should not have to pay for his care, since this injury has no connection to his father's military service.

I do want to point out that when family members experience psychological trauma, this trauma is sometimes connected to military service. During their career, soldiers must regularly tell their spouse that they are being deployed, but that they do not know where or for how long.

This type of situation creates a tremendous amount of stress for the spouse, who has no idea if the person will come home or what that person is getting into. That is extremely stressful. In the long term, it can have an impact on the mental health of the military spouse and that of their children. In this case, there is a very clear link between the need for psychological care for family members and the military service of the spouse.

In the case of Ms. Campbell, the crime was especially heinous. The monstrosity of the crime aside, the logical conclusion is that there is no link between the injury and the military service of the father. We are also talking about a 30-year old man, not a teenager or a child who was still in their parents' care or whose parent was a soldier or veteran at the time that the injury occurred.

The important thing now is to discuss what is currently going on with veterans. Let us be clear and honest. I know veterans who served under the Pierre Trudeau government, and those who served under the Chrétien, Martin, and Mulroney governments, and even under the current Prime Minister. Not one can say that everything went smoothly under any of those governments or any prime minister. The problems at Veterans Affairs Canada have been going on for decades.

● (1120)

Everyone is trying to solve these problems but sadly, over time, other problems are created, especially with respect to access to services, which often discourages people. Generations of veterans have wound up feeling abandoned because they have had enough of the endless back and forth with Veterans Affairs about their cases and the never-ending medical exams. That is unacceptable. To their mind, the injury they received during their military service is so obvious that it cannot be challenged. Unfortunately, veterans regularly abandon their claims because they are no longer able to go on fighting and they cannot understand why they are made to feel guilty about asking for what they are entitled to. These are real injuries and there is no doubt about their military service, but they are regularly required to fight with the department. That is unacceptable.

Veterans come to our riding offices asking for help. They come with two-inch files full of papers, including their medical file, correspondence with Veterans Affairs Canada and third-party medical assessments, in the hopes of solving problems that sometimes seem unthinkable. The compensation requested is sometimes $2,000 or $5,000. With everything that has been done administratively to block their claims, I am convinced that it is more expensive for the department to try to prevent veterans from obtaining reasonable benefits.

Facing these kinds of situations, which happen every day, and knowing that benefits have been awarded in some cases, people have every right to wonder what is going on in the department. Why is such nonsense happening? So many soldiers need treatment, but there are also family members who have to fight, deal with delays and are turned away six times before they actually manage to speak with someone.

This is not to mention one particular group that is being deprived of services: francophones. All too often, people have a hard time obtaining services in French. Unfortunately, I know a few veterans who have ended up accepting services in English simply to speed up the process. It is extremely frustrating. We need to take immediate action today to provide better services to veterans.

I would also remind members of the $372 million allocated to Veterans Affairs Canada that has yet to be spent. With that funding, how many employees could be hired in the various offices to provide services? It is worth doing the math, since $372 million is a huge amount of money that was supposed to help veterans, but has yet to be spent. We should all be thinking about immediate action we could take together, as members, to quickly restore adequate services for veterans and their families.

Too many people never speak of the sacrifices they make throughout their spouse's military career because they do not want to affect their health. We need to recognize their sacrifices and acknowledge that they are very much linked to their spouse's military service. Any benefits received should be related to military service.

● (1125)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

[*English*]

At the root of this issue is the fact that Mr. Garnier is receiving benefits from Veterans Affairs, in spite of the fact that he never served a day in his life in Canada's military. He is 30 years old.

When we look at similar situations in terms of receiving benefits, in the case of members of this House whose dependants receive benefits, the dependants will receive benefits until the age of 21, and then if they are in university they will receive them until the age of 25.

If a serving member of Canada's military ends up committing a murder and is found guilty of that murder, not only do they lose their benefits but their entire family loses their benefits.

I ask my hon. colleague whether she agrees that this member should be receiving benefits or not, given the circumstances that I have just cited.

● (1130)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Madam Speaker, as I said in my speech, there is no connection between the treatment and the military service of Mr. Garnier's father, so I do not see how he can be eligible for benefits regardless of the crime he committed.

There is no connection between the injury and the father's military service. I do not see why Mr. Garnier would be eligible for benefits to begin with. Under the circumstances, it is clear to me that Correctional Service Canada should pay for any treatment provided.

We should be focusing on what we can do now to improve services to families and veterans.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue for her speech. Like her, my thoughts are with the Campbell family.

In her speech, my colleague said that this is a very complex case. I can assure the House that she is right. She also said that it is confidential. My colleague said she has a solution based on articles she has read and the bits of information she has gathered.

Does my colleague agree that our approach, standing up before veterans and their families, is the right approach?

Ms. Christine Moore: Madam Speaker, right now, most of the veterans I know are much angrier than I am. When they see a murderer getting benefits from Veterans Affairs Canada, it is harder for them to appreciate the nuances of confidentiality and other legal issues than it is for me.

Most veterans, especially those who have fought for years to get benefits, are very angry about this situation. They really do not like how the government has handled this case.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, families are at the centre of military life. The Canadian Armed Forces recognized this in 2000, under a Liberal government, with the Canadian Forces family policy.

A central question that the Conservatives are asking is whether the minister has the arbitrary power to deny benefits to vets and their families without due process and administrative justice. Should they be politically expedient?

The Conservatives are very quick to the gun. They take action now and think later. We know the Conservatives are willing to use ministerial executive power to punish vets and their families that offer criticism. They did this in the past with Sean Bruyea.

Should this be the case today? Should we be debating how we offer services and the types of services we offer families and who should receive those benefits? Instead, the Conservatives want to be politically expedient and debate—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I will give the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue time to answer.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Madam Speaker, a comprehensive administrative review of what happened is needed immediately. In similar cases, departments have been able to work quickly when there seemed to be a problem. I imagine that is what the minister is currently doing. When it comes to the military, the department can perform quick yet robust analyses when immediate action is needed. I think that is what will happen. I hope that is what the minister is working towards.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Calgary Nose Hill.

While I appreciate the opportunity to speak to today's opposition day motion, I truly wish the incident had never happened and I did not have to speak on this subject.

Today, we are calling on the Liberal government to explain why Christopher Garnier, a convicted murderer, is receiving disability benefits from Veterans Affairs Canada for post-traumatic stress disorder that he sustained while committing a heinous crime. I hate to have to state the details of the incident, but I feel it is necessary to do so in order for Canadians and my colleagues across the floor to understand just how offensive it is that the Minister of Veterans Affairs has continued to allow Garner to receive disability benefits.

In 2015, Chris Garnier senselessly murdered Constable Catherine Campbell, an off-duty police officer, by strangling her just hours after meeting her for the first time. He then put her remains in a compost bin and dumped her near a bridge in Halifax. Her remains were not found for five days.

In December of 2017, Garnier was convicted of second degree murder in the 2015 death of Constable Campbell. He and was given a life sentence, with the option to apply for parole after 13 and a half years.

This is an absolute tragedy. Constable Campbell was not only a police officer but a volunteer firefighter. She wore two uniforms and served the community with dedication. She had a family that loved, and still loves, her deeply.

When reports came out earlier this summer that Veterans Affairs Canada was providing disability benefits to a convicted murderer, I was personally appalled and I know all my Conservative colleagues and most Canadians were as well.

The disability being treated is PTSD. It was sustained by Garnier from strangling Constable Campbell to death. The PTSD did not cause him to commit the crime, and it seems that he is blaming her for his PTSD. Now the cost of this murder to receive therapy from a private psychologist is being covered by Veterans Affairs Canada, a.k.a. the taxpayer.

The Prime Minister indicates veterans are asking for more than the government can afford, yet he and his minister are prepared to give money, set aside for veterans, away to someone who does not deserve it and has not earned it. Yes, that is correct, Mr. Speaker. You, I and all Canadians are paying for a convicted murderer to receive therapy for a disability that was caused because he murdered an innocent woman. He did not wear a uniform a day in his life and never served his country as a veteran has.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs states that Garnier is receiving benefits because his father is a veteran, yet this still does not make any sense to me.

My father was a veteran, so I am familiar with how these things can work. When I was 30 years old, I did not receive any benefits due to my father being a veteran. I stopped being considered a vet dependant after the age of 25, and it only lasted that long because I was in university, as is the case for most Canadians.

When I was hit by a car as a young man and left with disabilities, would Veterans Affairs have come to my aid after my father retired? I wonder. How is it that Garnier qualifies as a dependant? Why is Veterans Affairs so quick to provide a murderer with disability benefits. If this was a mistake, why has the minister not used his authority to stop this from happening? It is shameful that the minister has no answers to these questions day after day and that he has the audacity to ask if we can simply let this debate rest for now.

I am a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. It is an honour and privilege to sit on that committee and do all that I can to be a voice for veterans and advocate on their behalf here in Ottawa. During my time on that committee, I have heard countless stories about the struggle that many veterans face when it comes to obtaining their disability benefits.

I remember my first Remembrance Day ceremony as a sitting member of Parliament. A young veteran, who had served in Afghanistan, came up to me afterward and was very passionate about his experiences and concerns. One of the points he left me with was to stand up for him and his comrades and not to let the bureaucracy cheat them out of the honour they had earned by serving Canada. As my father always said, "Now is the time to stand up and be counted."

● (1135)

It seems extremely unfair that the men and women who have worn a uniform and have sacrificed their lives to keep Canada safe and secure have been pushed to the back of the line so a murderer, who never served for our country, can get benefits first. I have a constituent who has been waiting nearly a year and a half to receive his disability benefits, which deal with PTSD issues, with no light at the end of the tunnel.

Just last week there was another mefloquine rally on the front steps of Parliament Hill. Veterans who were subjected to this drug are fighting for their benefits in recognition of the huge impact that mefloquine has had on their lives and those of their families. People like Marj Matchee and David Bona are standing up and speaking for those who cannot. Where is their support from Veterans Affairs? They get none, yet a murderer who is a non-veteran gets coverage. These veterans had no choice but to take that medication. This murderer had a choice.

The penal system in Canada covers treatment for mental health issues, such as PTSD. This could include Garnier, yet Veterans Affairs Canada is footing the bill for his private psychologist. He does not need to use resources meant for veterans and their deserving families.

Why is the minister unable to explain the rationale behind this backward decision? What is taking so long for department officials to figure out how on earth this could have happened? Canadians want a response. In the meantime, the minister should use his authority to suspend the benefits until said response is provided.

It bears repeating the Prime Minister's recent comments to a disabled veteran, stating that Canadian veterans were, "asking for more than we are able to give". That comment was extremely offensive from the start, as our veterans have literally given their lives so we may live peacefully in our country. That highly offensive statement, compounded with the fact the government is paying for a murderer's PTSD treatment, is another virtual slap in the face to all veterans.

I am sure most of us here remember what happened to the former base commander at CFB Trenton, Russell Williams. He was convicted of committing two murders. Following his conviction, he was stripped of his commission, his ranks and awards by the Governor General on the recommendation of the chief of defence staff. His severance pay was terminated and the salary he received following his arrest was seized. His uniform was burned and his medals were destroyed.

Imagine the outrage Canadians would feel if they were paying for the private psychological treatment for Russell Williams for the PTSD he may have incurred while murdering somebody. It is a disgusting and abhorrent thought, yet this is essentially what is happening with Christopher Garnier. We get to pay for his treatment, all because his father, not him, is a veteran.

I want to make it clear that I and all my colleagues on this side of the House are 100% in favour of helping veterans and their families. Being a voice for our veterans family is one of my main goals at the veterans affairs committee. It is something I understand through my own personal experience, through multiple moves, multiple school disruptions, boarding schools, separations from my father, my parents, with challenges to myself, my siblings, my brother and my father. As they say, "Been there, done that".

Ultimately, the issue here is that these taxpayer-funded back-allocated disability benefits are going to somebody who, one, has been convicted of murder; and two, should not qualify as a dependent, as far as I can tell.

This man took a life, violently and senselessly. Our Canadian veterans have dedicated themselves to saving lives, both at home and abroad. They commit to defend our country, its institutions and its way of life. This man has disrespected our way of life and dishonoured our country.

I call on the Liberal government to do the right thing and stop funding treatment for a convicted murderer once and for all. It owes it to Constable Campbell, to her family and to all veterans who have served our country.

● (1140)

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as a serving member of 22 years, I always believe, and I know the Canadian Armed Forces believes, that family is and should be at the centre of military life. The Canadian Armed Forces recognized that in 2000, when under a Liberal government, it came out with a Canadian Forces family policy. It was the very first time there was an actual policy that defended families within the Canadian Armed Forces.

A central question that the Conservatives are asking is whether the minister has the arbitrary power to deny benefits to vets and their families without due process and administrative justice. Should they be allowed to be politically expedient when it suits their cause?

The Conservatives are very quick to the gun. They take action now and think later. We know the Conservatives are willing to use their ministerial executive power to punish vets and their families that offer criticism. They did this for 10 years. It happened to Sean Bruyea.

We will stand by veterans and their families come what may. However, services are important and who gets those services are equally important. I remember that it was very difficult to obtain the services veterans were entitled to when I was in the military.

Families are important. Do we use one case to limit the amount of services offered to all families within the military who serve?

● (1145)

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Winnipeg Centre for his service to his country.

He has talked about families and about veterans. This conversation that we have asked for is about an individual who is not a veteran. He is a member of a veteran's family. What we are asking the minister to do is to step up and stop paying for this, investigate it, and once that investigation is clear, determine at that time whether benefits should be continued. We are asking for that to happen.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, veterans, as we well know, serve our country. They sacrifice everything for our protection.

In my community of Vancouver East, we have a number of veterans who are homeless. We know that the federal government under the Liberals cancelled the national affordable housing program in 1993. The Conservatives took office and did not restore the national affordable housing program.

Given that the member sits on the committee, will he commit to bringing this issue up at committee and bring forward a national housing strategy for veterans?

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Madam Speaker, the member for Vancouver East may or may not be aware, but that topic is actually before the committee right now. As we move forward, that will progress.

I agree with the member that there are a lot of veterans who are homeless at this point in time. How do we step up and look at improving their lives? They gave their lives for us. That is what we try to do in the veterans affairs committee, and that is what I am committed to doing, to helping not only those veterans but the families who are impacted by what is going on.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, in listening to the speeches today and the questions and replies, we constantly hear Liberal members and NDP members say, "Well, the Conservatives did this."

However, the motion is about a lack of action being taken by the Liberal government. The Prime Minister failed. His minister has failed Canadians and failed veterans in that he did not act. Any good, strong leader or minister, when hearing something as outrageous—those are his own words—as this happening, would have called and cancelled it, investigated it and made a decision on it. Then he could have come back to this House and we may have debated that decision but we would have respected him for that decision.

I am outraged. I have lost respect for the minister because he failed us. He did not make a decision. He is passing it down the line.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Madam Speaker, the member for Yellowhead is absolutely right. This could have been resolved very quickly if at first the minister had stood up and said, "This is the first I have heard of it. I will get my committee on it. At this point we will suspend coverage of it until such time as the investigation is done."

Throughout this debate and whenever we bring up an issue like this one, we see the government practising what I like to call squirrel politics: "See the squirrel? Oh, where did it go?" That is what the Liberals do. They distract, instead of focusing on the issue. That is the question we have today before the minister and we ask for the Liberals' support.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, about a month ago, members in this House found out that a man who was convicted of murdering a female police officer and desecrating her body had claimed that he suffered from PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder, from the act of his committing the murder. This is a man who has never served a second in Canada's military, yet we found out a month ago that he was receiving private health care services from Veterans Affairs to treat his PTSD which he incurred in the act of killing a female police officer. That is wrong. There is no equivocation on it. That is not something that should be happening.

The motion before us today asks the House to instruct the Minister of Veterans Affairs to revoke the benefits for this man. Let us get into the reasons why.

First of all, I do not think there is anyone who is listening to this who thinks that somebody who has never served a day in his life in Canada's military, who has suffered PTSD from his own atrocious criminal act, should be receiving benefits reserved for our men and women who have fought for our country. This is not somebody who fought for our country. This is not someone who served our country. This is somebody who committed such a vile act against one of Canada's citizens that he has been convicted of a serious crime and is serving punishment for it. For him to receive benefits is wrong. It is flat out wrong. This should not be happening. My colleagues should support this motion because he should not be receiving benefits.

Let us get into more technical details.

First of all, he already has access to mental health benefits. For my colleagues who might not be aware of this, the Corrections and Conditional Release Act states that the service shall provide every inmate with "reasonable access to non-essential mental health care that will contribute to the inmate's rehabilitation and successful reintegration into the community."

This man already has access to these services and yet he is getting priority benefits that are reserved for veterans and their families. Does he have an affiliation with Canada's armed forces? Sure, but does that make it right that a man who has committed a very serious offence has access to those benefits? No, it does not.

Our responsibility in this place is to correct wrongs when they happen. This policy should not allow this man to receive these benefits. Whose responsibility is it to fix that? It is the responsibility of the Minister of Veterans Affairs. Every single one of the Liberals who have spoken in here today, three years after receiving their mandate, have stood up and said that it is Stephen Harper's fault. They have said that it is Stephen Harper's fault that a man who was convicted of murder is receiving PTSD benefits from Veterans Affairs. Come on. Nobody believes that. Even Liberals are going to be hard pressed to believe that. Any Liberal member who stands up in here is saying, "Oh, it is Stephen Harper's fault." Come on. They should do their jobs. The Liberals are three years into their mandate.

This morning, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, to cover a part of his body, his rear end, tweeted, "I have asked my officials to get back to me as soon as possible with the reasons for this decision." That is the minister's job. He should not ask his officials for the reasons of this decision. He should go to his officials and say, "Fix it. He should not have benefits. Fix it now and I want every policy option on my desk in an hour or else somebody is going to suffer the consequence for it so that this does not happen again." That is his policy. He should bring a memorandum to cabinet if that is what it takes. He should change the policy so that we can do two things.

The Liberals are standing up in the House saying that the Conservatives do not support benefits for families. Come on. It is the minister who stood up and explained to the Canadian media that the reason he was not spending money on veterans benefits right now and why there was unspent funds was because it was like a prepaid gas card.

● (1150)

Every single one of my colleagues here supports the benefits for families of veterans, because many of us understand what families go through when one of their loved ones is deployed or serves. Many of us have an intimate understanding of the long-term scars that can leave on a family and on a person. Of course we want to have benefits for these families. Of course we want to recognize their mutual sacrifice. However, when someone, regardless of his affiliation to that person, commits a crime that is so heinous that he is convicted and is suffering a punishment for it, and the PTSD he suffered was from desecrating a person's body, that person should not receive those benefits. That is a decision we can make in Parliament. That is why this motion is here today.

Every single one of those guys who stands up and says that it is Stephen Harper's fault or that we do not want benefits for veterans, it is those members who are abdicating their responsibility to our men and women in uniform, because by their defending this decision and allowing their minister to get off the hook for not dealing with this after 29 days, they are the ones who are holding back benefits for our veterans. They are the ones who have their priorities backward. The Liberals are three years into their mandate. If they wanted to do more for our men and women in uniform, they have had three years to do it. What do we hear? "It's like a prepaid gas card."

We stood in here earlier this week and asked the Prime Minister and the minister over and over again if they thought it was right for this man to get benefits. The Prime Minister's response was that he should not have to answer that question. Come on. He should be a leader and stand up for what he believes in. I am standing up for what I believe in. I will proudly stand here and say that this man should not be getting benefits.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs has had 29 days to haul his officials in and say, "Fix this problem." In any other universe that would be grounds for firing, because this is a no-brainer. That is all we are asking today.

My colleague from the NDP talked about different ways we could look at serving our veterans and their families more effectively. Yes, let us talk about that in this place. That is wonderful, but in this particular instance, for this motion, the business that is at hand today, every single member in the House has to stand up and say that it is not right that this man is getting benefits and those benefits should be revoked, and any sort of policy that allows this interpretation to happen should be changed so that someone who commits murder, who has never served a day in his life, does not get the benefits that are afforded to our men and women in uniform who have served for us. This man already has access to mental health services through the corrections act.

Anyone around the world who is watching this will be standing up and asking what is happening in Canada.

I cannot believe that the Minister of Veterans Affairs' only response to this was to say he has asked his officials to get back to him as soon as possible. That is the minister's job. He has to go and ask his officials to fix this.

Every single member in the House should stand up and support this motion. Every single Liberal member of Parliament should be going into their caucus room on Wednesday morning and asking, "Why haven't you fixed this?" If it had been our minister, I can say right now that is what would have happened on Wednesday morning. If the Liberals want to call it Stephen Harper's fault, he would never have let someone take 29 days to respond to a clear-cut case like this.

On their record, the Liberals have had three years. At what point in time are they going to stop saying that it is someone else's fault? They should get their values straight and do something right for once.

● (1155)

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Conservative member for Calgary Nose Hill was in cabinet under Stephen Harper. Incredibly enough, the Privacy Commissioner ruled that Sean Bruyea's case was alarming, and the treatment of his personal information was entirely inappropriate when the Conservative government used that information to silence their critics.

Retired Colonel Michel Drapeau said that the government's actions were despicable, dishonourable, unethical and also illegal.

Let us talk about leadership. Where was the member for those 10 years? Our minister, the Minister of Veterans Affairs has asked his department to ensure that the services being received by a family member of a veteran are related to the veteran's service-related illness or injury, and where they are not that a case be reviewed by a senior official before a decision is rendered.

He has also requested the department address its policy in relation to providing treatment to family members who have extenuating circumstances, such as the conviction of a serious crime. From now on, in cases with extenuating circumstances, the decision to extend treatment to a non-veteran family member must be made by an area director in consultation with our departmental health professionals.

The minister is taking action. He is doing the right thing. He is not simply standing around and taking action now without thinking.

● (1200)

Mr. Phil McColeman: He is passing it off to his bureaucrats.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sure that the member for Calgary Nose Hill is able to answer that without any help.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Madam Speaker, first of all, in the case that my colleague referenced, that man is actually suing this Minister of Veterans Affairs for defamation. Success; it is working so well.

I am disgusted that the member would stand up in the House and try to defend this Minister of Veterans Affairs. If he had any honour or any shame whatsoever, he would say that it is completely unacceptable to pass off to bureaucrats what our job is. Our job is to stand up for these men and women.

The member should not be standing here defending the fact that his minister does not have the compunction, or the Prime Minister does not have the brains, to stand up and say that this is wrong. They should have been on this 29 days ago, in the department, saying that this guy does not get benefits, and that if this happens again, heads will roll; this is how we are changing the policy.

That is what political leadership is. That is what leadership is, when there is a mandate to protect these people. It is not to have their colleague stand up and cover their lack of action. Come on. That is disgusting.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. Knowing that she has served as minister, I would like to ask her a question.

When ministers want answers right away on what happened with a particular situation that might be hard to understand, how do they get people to find those answers and how long should it take?

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Madam Speaker, if something like this had happened in my ministry, I would have walked down, into the program level in my department, and not left until I found out who made the stupid decision, held them to account, and then changed it so that it would never happen again.

All the minister has to do is walk down and get some answers. He has had 29 days to do that. What has he done in this time period? Looked through his Twitter feed? I do not know. He sure as heck has not done that.

He needs to get his act together. The Prime Minister should not be allowing him to take this long to do it. He has thousands of people who work for him.

To every person who is in veterans affairs today, if they are giving this minister any other advice than "fix this", then they need to give their head a shake, too.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I just want to give my colleague, the member for Calgary Nose Hill, the chance to expand a little more on the stream that she had going in her initial speech.

I have always been a firm believer that every single person, from the time they first achieve cognitive thought, knows the difference between right and wrong. On all levels, by anyone's definition, what is happening today in the case of Chris Garnier is wrong.

Would my colleague, the member for Calgary Nose Hill, please expand upon her comments, and try to educate members opposite on how they can start to believe the difference between and right and wrong, and why we need to do what is right in this particular case?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Madam Speaker, my advice for my colleagues across the aisle would be this: stand up in their caucus on Wednesday and say, "Why am I taking calls from constituents saying that we are defending giving a cop killer veterans benefits, when he has never served a day in the military?"

That is what their caucus meetings are for. They should be holding this minister to account. They should be ashamed of putting out any talking points, anything other than "We are going to fix this".

It is simple. Anybody who stands up in the House today and says anything otherwise does not deserve the right to be re-elected.

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my fellow members of Parliament have brought up an issue that is important not only to me and this government but to everyone in Canada, the well-being of members and veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces and their families.

I would like to reassure the House that this government is committed to improving the health and well-being of our veterans. This government has made it a priority to provide not just all Canadian Armed Forces and Royal Canadian Mounted Police members and veterans the support and services they so rightly deserve, but also their families.

Most Canadians understand that the government is legally bound to protect the confidentiality of its veteran clients. This is a responsibility that we take seriously. Veterans should never have to worry that we would expose their personal information or use them as pawns for the sake of political gain, which is why I am disappointed that we are here discussing this opposition motion and ignoring the issue that has taken place.

All of us feel disgusted at the crime that has taken place. This is a feeling shared by all members in this place and Canadians across the country, but it is more important to Conservative members to try to expose more personal information for the sake of headlines.

Their focus should be on the health and well-being of veterans, in particular their mental health, which is a priority for Veterans Affairs Canada and for our government. Mental health is critical to overall wellness, and we know how important it is when it comes to our men and women in uniform transitioning to life after service.

That is why this government is committed to helping veterans living with an operational stress injury get the help they need, when they need it, and, more importantly, in person whenever possible. The three recently opened operational stress injury satellite service sites will help with this.

It is important to note that currently 96% of applications of post-traumatic stress disorder are approved, up from where it was under the Conservatives.

We took seriously the concerns of the Auditor General who criticized the previous government for not doing enough to facilitate veterans' timely access to mental health benefits, so veterans can access supports even before their application is approved.

This is also why, if it is identified that a veteran could benefit from a family member receiving counselling or other services, the department steps in in order to help the veteran. The focus of providing mental health supports to a family member is always based on the best interest of the veteran's well-being, and the decision is always made in consultation with public health professionals.

Veterans Affairs Canada offers both direct and indirect support to veterans' family members through a variety of benefits and services. The following are a few examples: case management services, transition services, mental health services, rehabilitation services and vocational assistance, caregiver recognition benefit, public service health care plan, financial benefits and disability death benefits, pastoral outreach network, VAC assistance service, and operational stress injury social support.

By providing specialized, evidence-based assessment, treatment and support, along with educational programs for individuals, couples and families, Veterans Affairs Canada is better able to assist veterans and their families.

It is clear to this government that when members serve, the whole family serves with them, which is why their health and well-being is also a priority for us. That is why families are central in the suite of benefits, programs and services that my colleagues talked about earlier.

In addition to mental health support services, the veteran family program is available at all 32 of the military family resource centres across the country.

Both this past summer and last year, I had the opportunity to attend the military family resource centre at Base Gagetown. Individuals and families told me how much they appreciate the benefits and services that are being offered and their enhancement.

What this means is that medically releasing CAF members, veterans who are medically released and their families who are in need of assistance, will now have access to more services that focus on the well-being of the entire family. This can include mental health first aid, referrals to programs and services, and access to the military family services program. This is in addition to the recently announced centre of excellence on PTSD and related mental health conditions.

● (1205)

Everyone here understands the value of research and the need for scientific data to make informed decisions. We are committed to working with researchers, taking an evidence-based approach to developing new programs as part of our mission to better serve veterans.

The centre of excellence on PTSD will work to advance mental health research and support to improve the treatment of mental health conditions that impact veterans, Canadian Armed Forces members and their families. It will be a place where mental health professionals across the country can create and share knowledge on veteran mental health treatments that work. The research component will be critical as the centre will work to leverage scientific advancements in the area of military and veteran mental health while also developing best practices in assessing and treating mental health conditions.

A large part of the success of this centre will be through our partnership with the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research and capitalizing on the network of over 1,000 researchers at 43 universities across our great nation. As well, we will be working alongside many other recognized Canadian centres, institutes and universities. It will place it directly into the hands of other professionals across the country working with veterans on a daily basis. It will also focus on research, clinical program and tool development, education and outreach. The centre will provide important information to front-line health care service providers on mental health conditions specific to veterans and their families.

This is a perfect complement to the existing partnerships for mental health as offered through the operational stress injury clinics, which are commonly known as OSI clinics, and by individual health professionals located throughout Canada. When it comes to mental health for veterans, timely professional treatment is the key to recovery. It is why veterans affairs funds a network of 11 OSI clinics across Canada. Ten of these clinics provide outpatient treatment for PTSD and other operational stress injuries, and there is one in-patient clinic located at Ste. Anne's Hospital in Montreal.

This week will promote awareness and spark further discussion on the realities of mental health, for which much work needs to be done.

I will be splitting my time with the member for Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation.

● (1210)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find the debate today very troubling in terms of what the government has been saying. I have not heard one Liberal stand and say definitively that this is wrong or unacceptable.

It has been 21 days now or longer, why does this minister not have a response? This is a very simple motion, with what should be a very simple definitive answer that the government supports the opposition 100% on this, that this is clearly wrong, that the murderer getting veterans benefits is wrong and that it will do everything in its power to stop it immediately. Why are none of the government members saying that? I certainly think their constituents expect them to.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Mr. Speaker, there is no person here who is not aghast at what happened to the constable in Nova Scotia. It is the neighbouring province to my home riding of New Brunswick Southwest. This is certainly a privacy issue, it is an individual issue. No one has asked if the benefits have been changed. We cannot comment on that. It is a privacy issue. There is a family who is grieving.

What I wanted to highlight is what we have done and offered for veterans affairs services as a government, which is very significant. It is $10 billion of new money. I not only a new member to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, I am also the daughter of a veteran and the sister of a fallen veteran. I get it.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member's colleague stood a moment ago and said that he agreed with us on the fact that this was terrible and wrong, and he said to just give them time and they would get this corrected.

Could this member not say the exact same thing, say that it is wrong that this person who has never served a day in their life is getting veterans affairs funds? Could she just not say that this is wrong and that her government will deal with this in due time?

● (1215)

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Mr. Speaker, it is ghastly. I think it is terrible what took place regarding the murder of a wonderful woman in Nova Scotia. Certainly, this is an individual case, and it is also a case of privacy. We are not in the position to be releasing the details.

When a member serves, the entire family serves. I know what it was like when my brother passed away and how quickly the benefits came in a couple of years ago and what that meant to my brother's family.

It is not about sharing the details of an individual case. This is a privacy issue, and perhaps the individuals involved may want to discuss it more publicly.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I had the honour of being the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of National Defence, we were doing the strong, secure and engaged, the overall plan for the military. One of the points driven home to us time and time again was that when a member deploys, so does his or her family. It is also true for veterans. A veteran is not a veteran by him or herself but is a veteran in a family context.

My concern is that we are on the floor of the House of Commons, and we have before us a very bad set of facts. There is no question that we have a bad set of facts, but as they say in law school, bad facts make bad law.

I would be interested in the hon. member's observations with respect to the overall policy that veterans benefits should be made available to the family and her concern that these egregious facts, on which every member agrees, should in fact drive a change in policy.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Mr. Speaker, I think that providing services is absolutely essential to a member's family. As my colleague mentioned, when a member serves, so does his or her family, in many ways. There is time away from home. There are the ghastly experiences someone goes through. I think it is responsible for us as a government, on all sides of this House, to stand up for veterans' families. The case before us, in terms of this motion, is an individual case, and I think that in good time, there will be a result that may be more amenable to people here in the House as well as across Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the devotion of our men and women in uniform is undisputed and unparalleled. I assure my colleagues that just as veterans and their fallen comrades have made sacrifices to preserve our future, our government is committed to protecting them and their future. Our government made promises to veterans and all Canadians, and we are committed to keeping those promises. That is what we are doing. We have heard the concerns of soldiers, veterans and their families and we consulted the veterans' community, as well as veterans advocates and experts, on the best way forward.

That being said, we recognize that we will never make everyone happy. Our government has made a lot of positive changes over the past three years in order to better serve veterans and their families. New and improved Veterans Affairs programs have all the necessary ingredients for promoting well-being; an important one is the balance between financial, mental, physical and social well-being.

The result is a flexible set of benefits and programs that enable veterans and their families to decide what type of compensation is best for them. One of the promises was to provide a lifetime monthly pension. In his mandate letter to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, the Prime Minister clearly asked him to "[r]e-establish lifelong pensions as an option for our injured Veterans, while ensuring that every injured Veteran has access to financial advice and support so that they can determine the form of compensation that works best for them and their families."

The new pension for life was announced last December and was designed to provide the greatest possible support for the most seriously injured veterans. This new approach consists of a combination of benefits that provide recognition, income support and stability for military members and veterans who suffer from a service-related illness or injury.

One of the benefits that we are especially pleased to provide is the compensation for pain and suffering. It is a non-taxable lifetime monthly payment in recognition of service-related pain and suffering. This benefit is based on the extent of the impairment, and the monthly and lump-sum options give members and veterans the opportunity to choose what is best for them and their families.

The additional pain and suffering compensation, which is also a monthly, non-taxable benefit, provides additional support for veterans who have a service-related permanent and severe impairment. This benefit is paid in addition to the pain and suffering compensation and is meant to recognize the barriers to establishment in life that veterans face after service.

The income replacement benefit is another monthly program that will provide income support to veterans who need financial assistance because they are experiencing barriers to re-establishment in post-service life due to a health problem resulting primarily from service. In some cases, the benefit may also be offered to veterans, survivors and orphans, should they need it.

We realized that what we announced in December might have seemed complicated, which is why Minister O'Regan held round table discussions with veterans and stakeholders across the country. We wanted to make sure that veterans and their families understand the scope and the impact of the changes we are introducing. These meetings were also an opportunity to hear what veterans and stakeholders think about the new approach.

Overall, many people are satisfied with these changes. We are all aware that the needs of Canada's veterans have changed a lot over the past century. Since the Pensions Act was introduced, Veterans Affairs Canada has ensured that its programs and services have kept pace with those changing needs by adopting a better approach that incorporates the financial, mental, physical and social factors that play a role in the successful transition to post-service life.

● (1220)

It is clear that the new pension for life meets the government's promise to bring back a lifetime monthly pension. More importantly, it reiterates the government's unwavering commitment to ensuring that all veterans and their families are treated with dignity, respect and fairness, which is really at the heart of everything we do.

Over $6 billion in initiatives were announced in the 2016 and 2017 budgets, and we are investing another $3.6 billion on top of that in the flexible package of benefits and programs that is the pension for life.

We are committed to providing financial compensation for service-related pain and suffering. We are committed to providing income replacement to provide financial support for veterans during rehabilitation or to compensate them for their loss of income. We are committed to providing education, work and physical and mental health support programs for veterans. We are committed to making veterans' lives easier.

We know that every veteran has their own unique history and situation. That is why pension for life was designed to give every veteran the flexibility to decide what form of compensation works best for them and their family during the transition from military to civilian life. Pension for life provides a full suite of financial security and wellness elements to help veterans and their families transition to the next phase of their life and make choices about what they want to do next, whether it be education, work or retirement.

We have made a lot of progress in enhancing support to our courageous veterans. The government will never stop working to improve the lives of our veterans and their families.

Following a review, the Minister of Veterans Affairs has informed the department that services received by the family member of a veteran must be related to an illness or injury connected with the veteran's service. Where they are not, the case must be reviewed by a senior official before a decision can be made.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs is directing the department to address its policy on providing treatment to family members under extenuating circumstances, such as conviction for a serious crime. From now on, in cases involving extenuating circumstances, the decision to extend treatment to a family member other than the veteran must be made by a director, in collaboration with departmental health professionals.

In this specific case, it is important to understand that we cannot comment any further on the shameful murder of Constable Campbell. Our hearts are with the family, and we offer them our condolences.

● (1225)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before we continue, I want to remind the members that when referring to another member, they must use the name of the individual's riding or their title.

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech.

The 338 members of the House of Commons are all in favour of supporting veterans. That is not the issue. What we want to know is how the Canadian government can give benefits to a murderer who never served in the Canadian Armed Forces and, even worse, murdered someone in uniform.

November 11, the 100th anniversary of the armistice, will soon be here, and we will be meeting with our veterans at remembrance events.

My question is very simple. How will the member explain this terrible decision to them?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, we cannot comment on this case in the House.

I will meet with veterans with my head held high. On November 11, we will commemorate the armistice as we have always done. We will stand up for our veterans.

I do not know how the Conservatives will face veterans after making cuts for over 10 years. The Conservatives shut down thousands of offices that provided front-line services to veterans.

It should be noted that our government is in the process of rehiring that staff. It is a long process. The Harper government's 10 years of inaction and cuts left us with a lot of work to do, and that is what we are doing.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the situation of our veterans has deteriorated. Veterans are waiting longer and longer to find out whether they are eligible for benefits. This problem started with the Conservatives' budget cuts a few years ago, but things have only gotten worse under the Liberals' watch. Veterans are waiting even longer, despite the Liberals' election promises.

My question is extremely simple. Why is the money that is supposed to be allocated to veterans in the budget not being used to help those veterans, whom the Liberals say they want to help?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

What I like about that question is the part about how things seem to be worse under the Liberals. I can assure the hon. member that the rehired front-line officers are providing better service, suitable service. The ratio of cases per front-line officer has been considerably reduced. Each field officer now handles a dozen fewer cases. I can assure the hon. member that we are on the right track. A lot remains to be done. I agree with my colleague that we must do more. What I can say today is that we stand with our veterans and always will.

[*English*]

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member across the way talked about what the Liberals have done for veterans, and so forth, but in this case, I am wondering if he or anyone across the aisle has actually surveyed veterans about what they think about a cop-killer who has never served a day in the military getting benefits from Veterans Affairs because that person got PTSD from killing someone. What are veterans saying, or are they saying anything to you, or do you care what they think?

● (1230)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am sure the hon. member for Edmonton Griesbach does not want my opinion. I will defer to the parliamentary secretary. When hon. members ask questions, they should ask through the Chair, not to the Chair.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

We do not consult veterans on such specific, sensitive cases, on a murder as heinous as that of Officer Campbell. What I can say is that our minister and our Prime Minister have been clear: we must consult our veterans. My minister is consulting veterans. He has held a record number of consultations, round-table discussions, and meetings with veterans. That is what he has done, and that is what I intend to do in support of my minister. That is what we will do for as long as we are here.

[*English*]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my good friend, someone whom I have great respect for, the hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George.

Before I stood up here today, I walked up to the third floor, as I often do. I went to the Memorial Chamber and looked at the Books of Remembrance. I do this because it serves as a reminder to me of the reason I have the privilege and the honour of sitting in our symbol of democracy. I do it often, out of respect for those who paid the ultimate sacrifice. I do it for their families. I certainly appreciate the service and sacrifices that our members of our military and their families have paid to this country.

It is a sad day in this country when veterans who are suffering from PTSD have to stand in line behind a convicted murderer who never served a day in his life, in order to receive PTSD benefits. I never thought we would get to this point, but here we are on an opposition day asking the government to do something very simple: to stop the benefits to police killer, Christopher Garnier.

Members can imagine my surprise last week when we stood in question period and asked the Prime Minister about this issue. I asked what I thought were very fair questions about how this could happen and what he was going to do to resolve it. Of course, the Prime Minister stood up, as we have heard during the debate today, and talked platitudes about veterans, and the Veterans Affairs minister stood up and gave an infomercial on all the things his government is doing. If we ask veterans, the Liberals are not doing by them very well. Veterans will tell us that.

I had a follow-up question about how he could justify a paying PTSD benefits to a person who had killed a police officer, and a volunteer firefighter as well, meaning someone would had actually worn two uniforms in her community. How could the Prime Minister justify paying those Veterans Affairs benefits for PTSD to someone after he had murdered a police officer, Catherine Campbell? The answer from the Prime Minister was absolutely ridiculous. He accused us of fearmongering, of being insensitive to the issue. He refused to answer the question. He actually sat down and did not answer the question in question period in the House, where the opposition is obligated to hold the government to account. The reaction across the country since then has been nothing but incredible in terms of the outrage against the Prime Minister, and now the Minister of Veterans Affairs, for refusing to answer the question.

It showed, as I have said many times in the House, that the Prime Minister and the current Liberal government do not want an opposition. They want an audience. I have news for the Prime Minister and the government: we are going to continue to push on those issues that are important to Canadians, and this one certainly is. It is why we are standing here today, all day in Parliament, asking the government to stop this incredibly egregious act of paying a benefit for PTSD to a convicted police murderer who has never served a day of his life, not even one single minute, in Canada's military and yet is receiving those benefits.

In fact, on that day, within that question I posed to the Prime Minister, I suggested a fact, that if a serving member of Canada's military were to commit a murder, not only would their benefits be lost, but so too would be the benefits of their family. Christopher Garnier was not a dependant, as defined under any benefits plan. Certainly under the plan for us here in Parliament, we are entitled to benefits for our dependants, as do many other workplaces. Those benefits are paid up to the age of 21, and in the case of their children being in post-secondary education, they get those benefits paid until their dependants are 25. They do not get them when they are 30. They are cut off.

● (1235)

It is a really simple solution on the part of the government. We are standing here today not only on behalf of veterans and their families, including the Campbell family and friends, but more importantly for Catherine Campbell herself, the police officer who was killed by Christopher Garnier in Truro, Nova Scotia, to say at all levels that this is wrong. We are asking the minister and the Prime Minister to act on this case, which is well within their prerogative.

The reaction has been swift across this country. In fact, when this case broke almost four weeks ago, Stephen McNeil, the Liberal premier of Nova Scotia, said that he was initially stunned and shocked by the department's help for Garnier. He made this point in recent conversations with the veterans affairs minister and another Nova Scotia minister, whose title I do not quite know at this point as he seems to hide a lot. He stated:

> I don't believe anyone in their drafting of this policy to look after military families believed that it would be looking after a convicted killer in our province, and I strongly voiced that issue with the federal government and with my colleagues and they will look into it.

Look into it? It has been four weeks. We have heard from Catherine Campbell's aunt, who wrote publicly on Facebook that Garnier had twisted the system and that she was sickened by it. She wrote:

> There are actual veterans who returned from war, or multiple wars, and they are killing themselves because they can't get help for the PTSD they suffer from through no fault of their own!

Subsequent to Thursday, the reaction I have received has been swift. There has has been anger and disbelief from right across this country. A serving RCMP member, a former co-worker of Constable Campbell, talked about the fact that they have been trying to receive PTSD benefits for seven years. There is another one that said that they received a letter, a FOAD letter, which they referred to as an "f-off and die letter" from Veterans Affairs. These are the types of examples of what people are telling me and my colleagues right across this country.

I think it was best said by Medric Cousineau, whom I call a friend. He is an advocate for PTSD service dogs. He was interviewed recently, and said that what Garnier was suffering from was not PTSD, but remorse, remorse for killing Catherine Campbell, remorse for putting her body in a composting bin, and remorse for dumping the body under a bridge.

What have we heard from Nova Scotia MPs? Nothing. Not a single word. Some of them will stand up today and tout the government's success with veterans. As I said earlier, that is arguable. We have heard nothing from Nova Scotia MPs. They sat there like crickets, when they should feel outrage about this case, the same type of outrage caused by this murder and the same type of outrage right now in Nova Scotia because of the government's abject failure to deal with the situation and remedy it properly.

We heard earlier that the minister was talking about bumping this down to some mid-level bureaucrats, some mid-level area managers, to decide in the future. I have news for the minister: That department belongs to the Government of Canada, it belongs to the Parliament of Canada, and it belongs to the people of Canada. If the minister is not going to accept responsibility and make the right decision for the sake of the Campbell family or the veterans who have to stand behind Christopher Garnier to gain those benefits, if he is not going to accept responsibility for what goes on in his department, for running his department properly and for doing the right thing, then what need is there for him? I call on this minister, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, to resign his post and put someone in there who can do the job effectively.

● (1240)

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like the member to be honest in comparing what the Conservative government did for veterans in its 10 years and what our government has done for veterans in our three years. Does he have the courage to say the truth to the Canadian people?

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, does the member have the courage to stand and say that his government acts like petulant teenagers every time it is faced with a serious issue in the country? It should accept responsibility for this situation.

The decision to provide benefits for Mr. Garnier was made by the current Liberal government. It was made by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Veterans Affairs in their overall responsibility and control of government. I find it absolutely shameful that they are going to the past to try to hide the fact that they did this, and they are not willing to do anything to correct it. It is shameful and, quite frankly, it is disgusting that they keep harping on that.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend and colleague from Barrie—Innisfil for the important work he has done for veterans, for bringing forward a bill to recognize the sacred obligation to veterans, which was defeated by the Liberal government.

At the same time, I have to talk about services for veterans today. We know the Liberals want to spend their time patting themselves on the back, while the backlog is growing and while veterans are waiting longer and longer to get the services and follow-up they deserve on disability benefits.

We also know the Conservatives cut 1,000 jobs when they were in government. Does the member regret that decision to cut 1,000 jobs and how does he perceive moving forward to ensure the backlog is eliminated and veterans get the services they very much deserve?

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, when I went across the country in my previous role as a critic for Veterans Affairs, I was the first one to acknowledge that mistakes were made in the past. Acknowledging problems is the first step in correcting them.

The Prime Minister stood in Belleville, with his hand over his heart, and made promises to veterans, promises that he knew he had no intention to keep. In fact, in Edmonton, in reaction to Brock Blaszczyk, the Canadian veteran who asked a question, he said that veterans were asking for more than what he could give right now.

What veterans are asking for is what the Prime Minister promised them. He has failed veterans of our country in every aspect. Veterans are taking notice. They are taking notice of the failed promises. They are taking notice of the red herrings. They are taking notice of this issue as well. They will not forget it in 2019.

● (1245)

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, bad cases make bad law. What do we do with a 16 year old who dealt drugs? She is the daughter of a veteran of 20 years. The vet has PTSD due to his services. Should that 16-year-old be denied services, denied education benefits when she later gets her life in order? That is a hypothetical case, but a case which could be real. The Conservatives are suggesting cutting benefits for family members over 21years of age.

Let us take another case. A 50-year-old veteran who was killed in service of his country has a 30-year-old son. Should that family be allowed to have benefits? He is a 30-year-old person. The member suggested anyone over age 21 should not have services. I think families should have those services.

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, it does not even deserve a reply. We are talking about a completely different situation here. Those who are part of the military receive benefits. They receive benefits until they are 25. I guess it is a hot topic for him. I guess he cannot justify it.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): We have a point of order.

The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, I simply want to say that I cannot understand anything from here, because members are yelling back and forth. I cannot hear the answers.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I thank the hon. member for her comments. That was not really a point of order, but it certainly is relevant.

[*English*]

I want to remind hon. members that when someone is speaking in the House, there are people who are interested in hearing he or she, not their comments. I do not mean everyone. There are only maybe two or three today who insist on having their opinions heard over and above what people are really trying to hear.

I will leave it with everyone and maybe I will impose the rules a little harsher when people start shouting across or shouting at each other.

The hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil has 25 seconds to finish his response.

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, it will not take that long. Clearly the member for Winnipeg Centre has an extreme amount of guilt in his heart right now for having to react in the manner in which he is, knowing full well that what his government is doing, what the Prime Minister and the Minister of Veterans Affairs are doing is completely wrong. Canadians know it and he knows it. That is why he is acting out the way he is.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to stand here today.

I am disappointed, but not surprised, by the comments coming from some of our colleagues across the floor, some who I deeply respect with respect to their service to our country. However, it is the talking points. I have listened intently to this debate.

It was August 28 when I received a message from our veteran community, asking if I heard about Chris Garnier who had heinously murdered Catherine Campbell, a Truro police officer of six years, badge 137. Catherine was also a volunteer firefighter.

In the process of the legal battle that he and his family waged, they used every dilatory motion possible to re-victimize Ms. Campbell's family, such as putting a peace bond on her family members during the court case because Mr. Garnier's family felt threatened. When the sentencing came up, all of a sudden he had PTSD. From what? He had PTSD from the murder he committed. How did we find this out? An email was sent during the sentencing, which was only about a month and a half ago.

Since August 28, when I did a video on my social media, over 90,000 Canadians have viewed it and they are angry. The comments we have received have been incredible. People are furious. I want to read one for members. It states:

"I am not allowed to lend my voice to the outrage of providing services to a non-veteran convicted murderer, however, I am absolutely speechless. Well, perhaps not speechless, but I'm trying to be polite and professional."

" As a citizen of this country, I am so angry and ashamed. As a Veterans Affairs employee, this is not what I signed up for when I began my career, providing services to our veterans and their families. I love my job and it is an honour to support those who are willing to lay down their lives for me and my fellow citizens, but now I just want to go home with my head hung in shame, knowing what someone in my organization has approved."

It goes on to say, "Under family services, it clearly states that we do not cover family members' own mental health issues. It is a provincial jurisdiction, or in this case, it is a Corrections Canada jurisdiction. We only directly support veterans' family members with their mental health issues only as needed for them to participate in a veterans rehab plan."

I offer that to members. All we have heard from the minister straight across the Liberal caucus is garbage. There is no other way to put it. It is shameful.

Veterans and first responders are listening today. I have had, if not hundreds, possibly thousands of messages regarding this issue. Chris Garnier murdered Catherine Campbell. He is currently appealing his case now because the judge was heavy-handed in sentencing. Chris Garnier met Catherine Campbell and two hours later he murdered her. He dumped her in a recycling bin, wheeled her through Halifax and tossed her away like a piece of trash. Now he and his family are trying to milk the system, using PTSD as an excuse. It is shameful.

Through my work on Bill C-211, we have worked hard in trying to break the stigma so those who are suffering can feel comfortable and know that when they come forward to talk about their stories, they will be believed. Now we have this dirt bag. I have said it, and I believe that with my whole heart.

● (1250)

This man is re-victimizing the family. He is taking advantage of a situation. He is using every tool possible. Now he is using PTSD as a mitigating factor, hoping to get some leniency in his sentencing. We have colleagues across the way, all whom I respect dearly for their service, coming out, spewing the talking points.

If a veteran commits a crime, he or she loses his or her benefits. My hon. colleague, the member for Barrie—Innisfil, mentioned it earlier that a 30 year old was not a dependant. To have a convicted murderer jumping in front of a veteran or a first responder who requires treatment is shameful.

The day after I posted my video, the minister said that he was seized with this issue. It has been 28 days. He stands in the House and blathers on. He had an opportunity at the beginning of this debate to talk about the action he had taken on this case, but he continued to spew political talking points. We can tell we are going into an election season, but on an issue like this, it is absolutely shameful.

I promised I was not going to get heated up, but I have received more messages from veterans.

One veteran says, "Hey, Mr. Doherty, I just want to scream and cry at the same time. I have been waiting in line for what seems like forever. Every time, veterans affairs has some excuse as to why. I served 21 years for my country, yet I have to continue to wait in line."

Mr. Garnier has already been receiving this treatment, yet he was only just sentenced about a month and a half ago. He immediately jumped to the front of the line. How did he do that? We have a lot of questions. Is he highly connected? We do not know. It is absolutely shameful.

This veteran goes on to say, "I am so lit up. I don't know what to do. I don't even know if.... the thoughts that are going through my mind. I don't know what to do."

I have two minutes left and I wish I had so much more time for this. It is absolutely shameful.

Catherine Campbell served our country and served our community. She wore two uniforms, and Christopher Garnier took her life.

It is not about hypothetical cases. It is not about "coulda, woulda, shoulda". It is not about his father's treatment plan. It has nothing to do with that. That is what is being paraded out there. It has not even been brought up. What was brought up is that his lawyer has said that he needs treatment for PTSD because of the crime he committed, the murder he committed. That is shameful. He has jumped to the front of the line.

I am going to leave the House with this, because it is important.

Freedom is not free. Our brave men and women, who have served our country and our communities, have paid our collective debt for our freedom, our safety and our security. When they ask for help, rather than welcoming them and telling them that their bill is paid in full, they are continually refused service or told to go to the back of the line. Many of them are losing hope. We continue to lose veterans and first responders at a horrendous rate. Why? Because of issues like this. They lose faith in the process.

This is wrong. Those brave men and women, who put the uniform on every day in service to our country, to our community and to our flag, sacrifice for us. Christopher Garnier did not serve. Instead, he took the life of someone who served her community and who was willing to give her life for her community. The Campbells and our veterans and first responders deserve better than what they are hearing in the talking points from the minister.

● (1255)

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the service from the other member and what he does in the House, and how he does not even use speaking notes. I too try not to use speaking notes, using just a piece of paper where I have written down some thoughts.

However, the decisions we make today in this House actually impact decisions that will be made in the future, and how the bureaucrats and functionaries will interpret our regulations. What do we actually do when we have a 16-year-old who is convicted of dealing drugs? She is the daughter of a veteran of 20 years, and that vet has PTSD and is receiving services from Veterans Affairs. Should that 16-year-old be denied services and later be denied education benefits that she may be entitled to? She might get her life back in order, but should she be denied those services?

I would also like to highlight another thing. Let us say there is a serving member who is 50 years old. He is killed in the line of action or in service of his country. He has a 30-year-old son who did not do anything wrong, but is 30 years old. He is not 21. He is not 25. He is not going to post-secondary, but he has lost his father. It is quite reasonable to be 50 years old in the military and have a child who is 20 or even 30 years old. Should that person be allowed services at the age of 30?

This is an important question to ask, and it is what this debate is about: What level of services should we be offering to veterans and to the families of those veterans?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, this debate is not about hypothetical questions. It is about a real issue. It is a real issue where Christopher Garnier, a convicted murderer, is receiving mental health benefits before our veterans or our first responders, who are deserving of them.

That is exactly what these guys want to do. They want to deflect and blame others, and they want to throw hypothetical scenarios out there. Let us talk about the real issue. The real issue is that we have a convicted murderer who is playing silly bugger with the court system and our Veterans Affairs system, and taking benefits away from veterans. He is claiming PTSD. He is playing games with this. Every step of the way, he is revictimizing Catherine Campbell's family.

They deserve better. Canadians deserve better, and I will not dignify that with an answer.

● (1300)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Questions and comments.

I just want to remind the hon. members that parliamentary language is something we try to promote as much as possible in the House. One of the words used was kind of borderline, but let us not push the envelope.

The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that we are all saddened by the heinous, despicable crime we are talking about today.

Even if we ignore the crime this man committed and pretend that his PTSD symptoms are the result of an attack he experienced, we are still talking about a 30-year-old man whose treatment has nothing to do with his father's military service. Even if we ignore the crime, I do not think that Veterans Affairs Canada should have to pay for his treatment. I do not think his file should even be considered a priority.

Does my colleague agree? Should Veterans Affairs Canada not be prioritizing dependent children or children who have suffered trauma directly related to their parents' military service?

[*English*]

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, regardless of the crime, we are talking about a 30-year-old who is serving time. Veterans Affairs has a program in place to make sure that our veterans are made whole when they come back. How they go about doing that is one way. I do not believe that a convicted murderer or a 30-year-old should be receiving these mental health benefits.

They are available through Correctional Services and provincial programs. They do not need to take the place of a veteran or a first responder in this case. It is shameful that we have veterans who are being denied simple services because of this. It is shameful.

I really wish the debate would just focus on this issue at hand. It is about Christopher Garnier and the murder of Catherine Campbell, and the fact that Christopher Garnier is receiving PTSD treatment from Veterans Affairs. It should be nothing else other than that.

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Winnipeg Centre.

I cannot imagine that there is a single heart in this place that does not go out to the family of Constable Campbell. We grieve with them and share the frustration of Canadians, who are upset that a convicted killer has received mental health services through Veterans Affairs Canada. Unfortunately, my friends across the way are taking advantage of a tragic situation to once again play politics with veterans benefits.

While it may be cathartic for some on that side to adjudicate this case in public, it is essential to protect the privacy of veterans who are clients of the department, and for that reason we will not be commenting on the specifics of any veteran's personal information, including the medical benefits that he or she may access.

Our government made a commitment to make it easier for the men and women who have served in uniform so courageously and given us so much to access the benefits that they so rightfully deserve. In 2015, we pledged to make it easier for veterans to access services. We said we would do more to support families, streamline benefits, reduce the administrative burden, improve the veteran's experience with Veterans Affairs Canada and help veterans make a successful transition to life after service. These were ambitious goals, and our government is making progress in leaps and bounds.

The veterans community told us loud and clear that we need to make it simpler, easier and more user-friendly to access the programs and services of Veterans Affairs. They told us about the effect of the backlog of applications for benefits and services and the time they have to wait for decisions to be made. They also told us that they do not always know about the suite of programs and services available to them, both of which are a result of the 10 years of cuts we saw under the Harper Conservatives.

Over the past three years, we have made significant improvements to both the programs and services available and our ability to communicate them to veterans. To make it easier for veterans to talk to our staff about these benefits, we reopened the nine offices the Conservatives closed, opened a tenth one in Surrey and hired over 475 new staff, including over 180 case managers.

We also increased service in the north. In 2017, our staff made 12 trips to Iqaluit, Yellowknife and Whitehorse to meet with veterans and their families. Our staff is committed to ensuring our veterans and their families are better informed, served and supported. We owe veterans the means to get back on their feet and on with their lives, and that is what our department is committed to delivering every day: helping them to accomplish that with a successful transition and, after their release from the military, to rebuild their lives and enjoy a healthy state of well-being.

We learned from the 2016 life-after-service studies that while 52% of regular forces veterans report experiencing an easy or moderately easy transition to post-service life, 32% report having trouble. With the Canadian Armed Forces projecting an average of 2,500 medical releases per year over the next five years, we recognize the importance of strengthening our transition services to members.

We also recognize that no two veterans are the same. Each has his or her own personal history and experiences that result in different needs and challenges. This is why we hear so much about the department's flexible approach to benefits and services that can be tailored to each veteran and each family's individual needs. We have worked to create a system that can be adapted to each veteran's particular needs at that particular point in time. We saw that the cookie-cutter approach left some veterans falling through the cracks.

Our pension for life not only addresses the wide variety of needs of veterans but also takes into account feedback from veterans on the need to reduce the complexity of support programs available to them and to their families. Pension for life has three key pillars: monthly, tax-free financial compensation, services and benefits, and an income replacement benefit.

This income replacement benefit will consolidate six income support benefits into one single financial benefit to simplify the administrative demand on veterans and their families. Veterans told us to streamline our programs, and that is exactly what we have done.

● (1305)

Let me come back to the idea that no two veterans are the same. While some prefer to interact with staff in person, other veterans prefer to find information and manage their interaction with the department themselves, using online tools. Working with feedback gathered through the service delivery review, Veterans Affairs simplified its online system, My VAC Account. It made registration both easier and more secure, simplified the language and added functionality. Veterans can now communicate with department staff, including case managers, using secure messaging in their My VAC Account. They can ask questions about their benefits and services and get reliable answers from qualified agents.

The program is proving popular and is gaining more than 1,000 new users every month. The department has also taken concrete measures to improve service delivery by telephone, and is taking the initiative to reach out to veterans to get the information needed to support claims and explain benefits.

With all of these new enhanced benefits and services, and increased efforts to inform veterans of what is available to them, application rates have increased dramatically over recent years. For example, over the past three years we have seen a 32% increase in disability benefit applications. That is good news. It means more veterans are aware of the benefits for which they may be eligible.

To keep up with the rise in demand and ensure that veterans get the services and benefits they need when they need them, the government is spending $42.8 million over two years, starting this year, to improve service delivery to Veterans Affairs Canada. Following our announcement of this funding, Union of Veterans Employees president Carl Gannon Jr. tweeted, "$42.8 million over two years to rebuild service delivery capacity...I can more than live with this."

We're going to do better to get veterans the benefits and services they need, when they need them. Following 10 years of nothing but cuts to funding and staff, we are rebuilding the trust of veterans with the investments needed to deliver services effectively and efficiently.

In addition to new funding, we have also made changes to ensure veterans receive the benefits they are entitled to. Veterans Affairs staff triage claims to ensure that veterans who apply for mental health services receive priority in their evaluation so they can receive treatment without delay. Mental health is an area where we provide access to services before a veteran is approved, in order to make sure they are getting the support they need to get better as soon as possible. Through additional staffing and process improvements, we have been able to increase the number of disability claims processed. For example, 96% of first applications completed for PTSD are approved.

As more veterans keep putting up their hand and asking for help, we want to make sure we have the staff and the capacity to make sure they have access to the services they need as quickly as possibly. To that end, we have hired more than 475 new front-line staff, new employees, to help ensure that veterans, Canadian Armed Forces members, RCMP personnel and their families are provided with the best possible services when and where they need them.

Make no mistake, Veterans Affairs continues to strive to provide faster, more efficient and higher quality service for our clients. I think all of us here can agree that Canada's veterans deserve respect, financial security and fair treatment. Be assured, our government is committed to treating our veterans with the care, compassion and respect they have earned.

It is important to remember, too, that there is a veteran involved in this case. The government of any day and any stripe has a responsibility to his or her health or well-being. What happened in Nova Scotia is a tragedy, and there is no person in the House who does not mourn with the family of Constable Campbell. No family should have to deal with the loss of their loved one. To play politics with so tragic a situation diminishes all of us and our responsibility to everyone involved.

We know there is always more to do, especially after inheriting a system left so neglected by the party opposite. We stand by our commitment to improve the lives of the men and women who have dedicated their lives to our peace and security.

● (1310)

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with all the new and enhanced benefits indicated in the member's speech, I wonder if he believes a 30-year-old murderer of an off-duty police officer should receive treatment programs designated to address post-traumatic stress in our military, programs that were set up for veterans, even though he was entitled to treatment for mental health issues through Canada's corrections services.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member across for his service in the RCMP.

This is a terrible tragedy that has come to our attention. We feel the shock and disappointment that everyone does. Our minister has taken steps to see what the best outcome can be for Canadians and veterans.

My friend across the way has had many years of experience, enough to know that knee-jerk reactions are not the way to deal with problems that may have complexities. The solutions may create unintended consequences down the line.

We are looking at this, and that is all I would like to say for now.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the question the member for Yellowhead asked, but in perhaps a different way, and that is whether the minister has made a mistake in that Mr. Garnier is entitled to funding through correctional services or the penal system. It is not as if he is destitute. It is not as if he is not going to get services. The funding that has been provided to him is designed for veterans.

This case is quite different from the cases being given by members of the government. This is a situation where funding was given to a man who committed a murder. He may be entitled to mental health services, but that is through the penal system.

As a result of what is happening, that funding should be going to veterans. We are talking about the long waiting list of veterans who are looking for benefits, and they are being taken away by Mr. Garnier.

● (1315)

Mr. Bob Bratina: Mr. Speaker, we need to go through the process to find out exactly what the situation is and how it came to be where we are now.

I have to say, again, with all due respect to my friend across the way, that we heard testimony in veterans affairs committee about years, going back eight or 10 years, of requests and upset at delays and the lack of funding and the lack of resources. As a new government, we are in the position now of trying to correct mistakes that were made in the past.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to start off with a golf clap. My colleague stood for 10 minutes and gave a speech. At the very end of his speech, he said that this is a horrific case. He dedicated three lines of that 10-minute speech to Catherine Campbell and Christopher Garnier and the issue at hand.

He said that the government listens to veterans. What would my colleague say to the veterans who are watching right now who rose up and said that his is horrific? They shared their own stories of Veterans Affairs turning a blind eye and shutting the door on them and shuffling them to the back. They are outraged about this. What does the member have to say to that?

Mr. Bob Bratina: Mr. Speaker, most members of Parliament will receive critical questions and remarks about services. We work with many veterans in our office. One of my staffers was walking in a shopping centre and encountered a gentleman we had been working with and asked how it had all worked out for him. He said he had received a significant amount of money from Veterans Affairs as a result of the intervention.

There are many good news stories out there that are not told and should be told, because we are working hard for our veterans.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker,

[*Member spoke in Cree*].

[*English*]

I would like to offer my sincere condolences to the family of Constable Campbell. This is a terrible situation, and we all share a sense of outrage about what occurred. However, I would also like to offer my thoughts on this debate, because I have a specific perspective on this debate.

I have been serving for 22 years in the Canadian Armed Forces, and I am still a serving member. I am a proud member of the naval reserves in Canada. I remember when I first joined the Canadian Armed Forces, and I was posted to Valcartier, in Quebec, our military base, with the Van Doos. It was a fun and exhilarating time, as a young man, to join the regular forces to serve full time. It was also extremely tough. It was very hard. I remember from that early period, in the 1990s, when I first joined, the work that was done by our leadership to make families a centre of the services, the centre of life in the military.

I remember taking medical mental health training with my fellow soldiers. We had to take this yearly. I learned that there were three components to serving well and learning to serve well. They were ensuring that we had a good personal life, a good professional life, and a good family life. They were the three principal spheres, and if one of them was not working well, we would find and encounter great difficulties in our professional life. We would not be able to accomplish the mission that had been set out for us, so we could not miss any of these elements.

As a serving member for 22 years, I have always believed that families should be at the centre of military life. In fact, I had a family when I was in the military. I believe that this is actually the Canadian Forces policy. Though sometimes it is not always respected within the Canadian Forces, because sometimes mission requirements do take precedence, nonetheless there are policies that are there to defend families. In 2000, the Canadian Armed Forces recognized this and came out with the Canadian Forces family policy.

In this debate, one of the central questions we are actually talking about is the level or amount of services actually offered to families. The central question the Conservatives are asking is not the one that is politically expedient. It is whether the minister should have the arbitrary power to deny benefits to vets and their families, not using due process and not using administrative justice. Should ministers be allowed to be politically expedient when it suits them?

Conservatives are quick to the gun to take action now and to think later. We know that Conservatives are willing to use their ministerial executive power to punish vets and their families who offer criticism of the government, because they did so under their previous administration, under the previous regime. They did so when they silenced vets and released their medical information without their consent. They shared that medical information. I am going to talk about that in a bit, because it is central to this case as well. I will say that we must stand with vets and their families, come what may.

Another important aspect of this debate is that services are important, and the question is who actually gets those services. I remember that it was very difficult to obtain the services vets were entitled to, especially when I was in the military. However, if we believe that families are important, and we have a family policy, do we use this one case to then limit the amount of services offered to families? Bad cases make extremely bad law. The Conservatives love using bad cases, because it is easy, but this bad case would make extremely bad law. It would make bad rules, and it would make bad regulations.

Decisions today actually do matter. They impact the services that are offered, and they impact how those rules and regulations will be interpreted in the future, not only by us in this House but by the bureaucrats and functionaries who actually carry out the orders of the executive branch. The Conservative motion, in my opinion, would lead to a tightening of the rules. This would have unintended consequences for vets and their families.

I remember, during the war in Afghanistan, how we needed to support our families to ensure that we had the widest opportunity to offer all services. We had the freedom to offer those services to those families no matter what their situation, because each family was unique and each veteran's case was unique.

●(1320)

I have asked hypothetical questions, and people have not been happy that I have asked them, but I am supposed to ask questions. What do we do with a 16-year-old who has dealt drugs? She is the daughter of a veteran of 20 years who has PTSD due to his service. Should that 16-year-old be denied services, denied education benefits later, when she gets her life in order? Let us say that this 16-year-old committed an even more heinous crime than dealing drugs, something irreparable, destroying the lives of others in ways that cannot be repaired. It is a hypothetical case, but it is possible.

Conservative political posturing puts at risk benefits for the military family. It makes it harder for bureaucrats to give them the services they require. We could tighten the rules. We could satisfy the political expediency of the Conservative Party. We could take action now, think later and regret later.

As the member for Calgary Nose Hill said, let us talk about leadership. She talked about leadership in this debate. I remember a time, in 2009, with the war in Afghanistan going full regime, that cuts were made by the Harper Conservative government, the cabinet she was a member of and where she had the opportunity of forcing her leadership on her cabinet colleagues. They made cuts to the military while we were serving in Afghanistan. There were thousands of reservists serving on army bases right across the country. At my military base in Valcartier, I remember how the contracts of reservists, who were serving full time, were not renewed, even though they were waging a war and working very hard to advance the national interest of Canada and serving the government and the people of Canada. That put the mission in jeopardy. The Conservatives did not really seem to care about what we were doing. They just decided that they were going to tell people what they should be doing and not listen to them, even though they were the experts. Those reservists filled important roles. They were an important component of mission success for many units in Afghanistan and back in Canada, and the Harper Conservatives cut those jobs. They cancelled those contracts and caused chaos in the deployed units trying to fight a war.

I like to talk about what the Conservatives did in their decade of darkness for veterans. In 2014, retired general Rick Hillier, the former head of the Canadian military, was talking about suicide and mental health anguish among Canadian solders. He stated,

> I don't think we had any idea the scale and scope of what the impact would be. I truly do not. This is beyond a medical issue. I think many of our young men and women have lost confidence in our country to support them.

Why would they not? The Conservative government at that time had killed the lifetime benefit for veterans. They did it on April 6, 2006, when it was in power and enacted the new veterans charter. The Harper minister insulted veterans and closed nine veterans offices. The Auditor General found the Harper government to be failing veterans. The Conservatives slashed 900 jobs in Veterans Affairs, despite pleas from managers. There was more than $1 billion not spent by the ministry to help veterans. A judge ordered the government to pay $887 million to veterans.

I do not believe we should release the medical information of veterans, even in debates in the House of Commons. When Sean Bruyea spoke out against legislation to strip vets of lifetime pensions, he never imagined in his dreams that the government of the day, the Harper government, would try to smear his reputation by using his medical records against him. His medical and financial details had been circulated after he criticized the new veterans charter. A Veterans Affairs official said that it was "time to take the gloves off", which was reported in the Huffington Post. The Privacy Commissioner said that Bruyea's case was alarming and that the treatment of his personal information was very inappropriate. Retired colonel Michel Drapeau, a lawyer with expertise in privacy laws, said that the government's actions were despicable, dishonourable, unethical and also illegal. However, this never stopped the government from going ahead.

We can order bureaucrats to do what we want, but sometimes we need due process and time to think about these issues to make sure that we do not have unintended consequences impacting veterans and their families. It is most important that the considerations here be deliberate and well thought out, not simply dog whistle politics to try to score easy political points on the backs of veterans, using them for political expediency to advance the interests of one political party.

● (1325)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend for his comments today. However, he will know that during our time in office, we increased spending on veterans by over 35% in various categories.

One of the things that was disturbing about my colleague's speech is his trying to conflate the issue of family, using a minor as an example, when here we have a 30-year-old person who was convicted of killing a cop, who never served a day in his life, and he is collecting veterans benefits, benefits that should be going to support our veterans.

Does my colleague actually believe that this is the way to treat our veterans, when they are waiting in line for services and here we have someone who is a convicted killer of a police woman receiving benefits?

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, here is another hypothetical.

A 50-year-old service member killed in the line of duty for his country has a 30-year-old son. If we start limiting the age of the family members who are entitled to services, saying "You're 30 years old", and I am not talking about crime; I am talking about the age.

The Conservatives have led us down a path about age. They have said that over age 21, they are not entitled. Over age 25, if they are in university, they are not entitled.

What I am saying is there is a reason for that, because we do have service members who are 50 and who have a 30-year-old son, and that service member is killed. We need to be able to support those families, and make sure they have the services that are required to help them.

That is the question. How do we make the regulations better, so we can actually serve families, and respect each and every value that we have here in Canada, all the Canadian values that are extremely important? That is an important question that we need to answer and think about, not only ourselves but with bureaucrats. We need to talk to veterans to find out how we can make these regulations better and really ensure that the services get to the people who need them the most, and that is veterans and their families. Families are at the centre of military life.

● (1330)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for most of the day so far I have listened to my colleague across the way who seems to be the point man for the government in the House on this today.

What the member fails to understand is this is a one-off case. The government, the minister, the Prime Minister and this member himself are hiding behind hypotheticals. They do not have the courage to actually know when something is right or wrong and to fix it.

Just like the minister who could say that this is wrong and demand that his department officials fix it, in the hypotheticals that the member is talking about, the minister could at some future point in time, should it ever come to pass, say that this is wrong, fix it.

Why is the member, who is a veteran himself, unable to understand that is how government actually works, that is the purpose of members of Parliament, and that is the purpose of the leadership of a minister, to fix the wrongs when the bureaucracy gets it wrong?

Does the member honestly think that the credibility of veterans affairs is being served by this ridiculous defence that the member is putting forward right now?

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we can counter, as well, that the opposite side has ridiculous arguments and has presented a ridiculous debate, wasting the time of the House.

Nonetheless, I will continue debating this, because it is important to the families of veterans. If I had a 16-year-old son who committed a crime, who, for instance, was dealing drugs, and I happen to have PTSD, and maybe in the service of my country I did have some terrible, dark moments in my life, and I will admit to that, nonetheless if I knew that it might, later on, limit his ability, if he managed to set himself on the right track, to obtain services which he might be entitled to, I would want him to be able to obtain those services.

I want to be sure that when we are setting regulations, we are not cutting off people who should get them. I think that is most important to veterans. We can use one case to decide thousands of people's future, but we should not be doing that. We should use one case to just think about the one simple case.

If we want to open a larger debate about services actually offered to veterans, I think we should do so in a calm and more beneficial way, which would bring greater accord to people. I do not think this case is the way to do it. The Conservatives are simply trying to score easy political points off the backs of veterans and their families, using them as pawns in their own political games so they can promote themselves on social media and get more likes on Facebook. That is all the Conservatives are doing.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before resuming debate, and we went through this earlier but I realize there are a few members who have come in as the rotation goes through. We went through the etiquette of not shouting while someone is answering or asking a question in the House. I just want to remind the hon. members to show respect and keep decorum in the House.

Resuming debate.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is one occasion when I am actually sad to have to rise in the House to speak on this issue. I normally begin my remarks with what an honour it is for me to rise on behalf of my constituents in Durham, on behalf of my experiences in the private sector and the charitable space and, as many members of the House know, speak to the issues that affect the Canadian Armed Forces, their families and our veterans. I said last week in the House that the Conservatives were going to be back here every day until the Liberals start to take some sense of ownership of their files. This is people's House. This is the House of Commons, where we are representing our constituents and the concerns of Canadians, be they veterans, family members, first responders or their families who are outraged by this situation.

I should say that I will be splitting my time with the member for Brandon—Souris.

Christopher Garnier is not a veteran. He never served a day in uniform and yet he took the life of Catherine Campbell, who wore two uniforms of service for her community and country. She was a police officer and in her spare time, she was also a volunteer firefighter, a young Canadian we should be proud of and should celebrate the fact that she dedicated so much of her life to serving others. Christopher Garnier snuffed out that life and he should be treated accordingly. He should be given no benefits from the federal government, certainly not those that are safeguarded for veterans.

On all sides of the House, and the member for Winnipeg Centre knows this, we have talked about the sacred obligation to our veterans. My first response when I stood in the House was to echo the words of Sir Robert Borden and the profound duty we owe to our veterans. In fact, I have echoed the sentiment of a World War I veteran who died in that conflict, Talbot Papineau, whose famous family now bears the name of the Prime Minister's seat, on the obligations we owe.

From the moment someone joins the Canadian Armed Forces, at 18, 19, 20 or older until the end of his or her life, we owe veterans that obligation. For those seriously injured, that obligation includes supports, benefits and treatment. Mr. Garnier is not one of those people. There have been a number of absolutely false arguments put forward by the government in its stubborn refusal to just do the right thing, acknowledge there was an error and rectify it.

Mr. Garnier, in September 2015, as the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia has confirmed, killed Catherine Campbell and then desecrated her remains. I will not go into the sordid details, but they are horrific. In December 2017, he was convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced in August of this year for killing a fine Canadian. What is horrific as well to not only the family but veterans across the country is that sometime ahead of his sentencing, he started receiving benefits from Veterans Affairs Canada.

The government's own documentation show wait times for assessment are getting past the nine-month mark on average. Therefore, in many ways, Mr. Garnier was placed ahead of veterans who are waiting for operational stress injury support, mainly counselling, psychiatric counselling and peer support services. How a convicted murderer, who never served a day in his life, received those benefits is a scandal and the failure to own that scandal by the Minister of Veterans Affairs is shameful. It was suggested that privacy or other reasons are preventing the discussion. I would invite anyone to see the coverage of the case in The Chronicle Herald newspaper or on CBC, where Mr. Garnier's lawyer told the court that his client has PTSD from committing murder, where the father of the killer admits to the court that his son has PTSD from a murder. That PTSD has nothing to do with his father's service in the Canadian Armed Forces.

● (1335)

However, for the minister to suggest that he does not know the file is a joke. Since I joined the Canadian Armed Forces at the age of 18 until this very day, I have either been in uniform or have been working to support those in it. When I was minister, I admitted where we fell short and worked with veterans to make a plan to make it right. I never lied, I never misled and I always read my briefings. I will debate any member on that side of the House any day on any of the issues related to Canadian Armed Forces and veterans. I will tell them, because the minister, we know from the news, does not read reports but shelves them, that there is not a single program within veterans affairs that Mr. Garnier would be eligible for or programs outside of it.

I was happy as a new member of Parliament to visit Can Praxis in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta, which was trail-blazing equine therapy for a veteran, a first responder, and a member of their family who were struggling. There are some programs available for spouses and dependent children. However, we are not talking about any of those circumstances in the Garnier case. This is an adult, non-dependent who murdered someone. I am sure that murder and the horrific circumstances around it have upset his family, but that has nothing to do with the service related to that veteran. That veteran, the father, needs as much support as we can provide. His adult, non-dependent child is not eligible for any programming, and the very fact that he can be accelerated before his judicial proceeding and sentencing is even complete, receiving benefits that some veterans are waiting for, is a travesty.

What I would like to see instead of the minister hiding behind privacy, when all Canadians can see this entire sordid story online or in the newspaper, is for him to take some ownership. A mistake was made where someone said there was eligibility when there was no eligibility. There is no legislative requirement for Mr. Garnier to get support. There are no privacy concerns that the Liberals cannot discuss it. He is ineligible. In fact, if the father had committed this crime while he was in uniform, he would not be eligible for treatment. That is how black and white this issue is. The fact is that once the Liberals craft a talking point, they will not move away from it, when veterans and Canadians are asking them to show some reality here.

We are always going to have cases where we need to do better, where we find a veteran or their family has fallen through the cracks. Let us fix those cases and rebuild trust, and not erode the trust by showing veterans that we are going to allow someone ineligible to access benefits faster than them.

As the minister should know, if he would read up, the permanent impairment allowance many veterans receive under the new veterans charter, and we increased the PIA supplement, was the focus of my attention as minister. A vast majority of veterans receiving the permanent impairment allowance have operational stress injuries. It has been something the Canadian Armed Forces has been struggling with. I talked about it on the 20th anniversary of the Swissair crash, which was the first time I ever heard "operational stress injury". That is why we were opening operational stress injury clinics and not administrative offices that people still do not use. It is amazing that the Liberals are still talking about those issues. It shows they do not understand.

As I said last week, if the minister had shown some leadership, I would rise in the House and thank him on behalf of my constituents, on behalf of veterans, for showing that if a mistake was made within the department that he will own, acknowledge and rectify that mistake. If they do not, they will hear us every day, because we are listening to Canadians. We are listening to military families and veterans who are discouraged and disappointed.

It is time for them to show ownership and stop this shameless treatment for Christopher Garnier.

● (1340)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to see the former minister take a position. He has been somewhat consistent and I would like to point out that consistency.

First, I sat in opposition for years while he, as the minister, allowed those veterans offices in every region of our country to remain closed even though hundreds if not thousands of veterans called on Stephen Harper and his government and the member as the minister to reopen those offices. They completely refused to listen to what the veterans had to say.

There is a difference between the Conservatives and the Liberals. We value our veterans and the need for privacy—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am having a hard time hearing the question. I want to remind the members that when the Speaker stands, normally it is quiet. I want to remind everyone that I am trying to hear the question and I cannot because of the heckling going back and forth.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives will remember that in 2010, Mr. Bruyea was an individual who had some issues with regard to the Conservative Party. Because of that, the minister at the time obtained information and the medical history of Mr. Bruyea and then information was leaked to the media. The bottom line is that the Conservative Party had to apologize for breaching the privacy of a vet.

Would the member acknowledge that it is important to protect the privacy of our veterans?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (1345)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I had a hard time hearing the question. I am hoping I do not have a hard time hearing the answer.

The hon. member for Durham.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg North said we should apologize to veterans. He should apologize to veterans for eroding their trust by putting a murderer ahead of veterans. He also said they value our veterans. He is a veteran. He served as an air traffic controller. I thanked him publicly for his services and I will again today.

All parliamentarians value our veterans, but right now with the Garnier case, only the Conservatives are listening to our veterans. They are outraged by the fact that a mistake was made. Rather than rectify the mistake, we see privacy concerns. We suggest we are not serving veterans by serving someone who never wore a uniform for one day.

I ask that member who has served to go and speak to the Winnipeg police, the volunteer firefighters outside of Winnipeg, and ask them whether we should be respecting a victim like Catherine Campbell by helping her murderer or rectifying the error that was made at Veterans Affairs.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, given that my colleague was once a minister at Veterans Affairs, I would like to ask him a question. What criteria should be used to determine whether the child of a veteran is eligible for benefits?

In this particular case, why would Mr. Garnier not meet that criteria?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question.

[*English*]

The member served in the Canadian Armed Forces and I have been proud to do some veterans affairs work with the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue and I appreciate that. It is a good question.

The determination on benefits is a subjective one, so someone at Veterans Affairs made a decision. It was a wrong decision because there are no programs whatsoever for adult non-dependent children.

Mr. Garnier was in his mid to late twenties when he committed a horrific crime. He was not a dependent child. Even if there were a dependent child, most of the programming, either family-based counselling or some programs with the child directly, relate to operational stress, transference injury from the veteran in the home. The mom or dad who has an injury can affect the wellness of the family. I support those programs. This is not a circumstance where those programs would be eligible, because the PTSD, in the words of the killer's father, do not come from his service in uniform; they come from committing a horrific crime as an adult.

The minister should get to know the files in his own department before he embarrasses himself day after day defending a clear error.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Brandon—Souris. I want to remind the hon. member that he will have 10 minutes to give his speech, and the questions portion will take place after oral questions.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today our Conservative caucus is shining a giant spotlight on an egregious error that needs to be rectified.

Since the news that a convicted murderer is receiving assistance from Veterans Affairs Canada, the reaction from veterans and everyday Canadians has been swift and overwhelmingly negative. Some were in shock that such a thing could happen. One would think that the person who approved his paperwork would have immediately took this up the chain of command and said that something must be done. I would hope that he or she said that the policy should be changed and the decision must not stand. No one faults the original crafter of the policy, as who could have ever imagined that Veterans Affairs funding could ever flow to a convicted murderer. There is never a wrong time to do the right thing. The House is now seized with this issue. We are here now. Let us deal with this matter once and for all.

When the news went public about what had happened, I thought there had to be a terrible mistake. I agree with the Minister of Veterans Affairs when he said that people are frustrated with how this happened. I know he understands that this is inappropriate, but what I do not know is if he wants to change the policy.

Like most Canadians, I shake my head and wonder how a convicted murderer could be able to receive funding from Veterans Affairs Canada so he could go through private treatment while in jail after he brutally killed an off-duty police officer, but somehow it happened. Veterans Affairs Canada is actually paying for his private treatment. Somehow the promised review of why this was carried out is taking weeks to finish.

Somehow the Prime Minister saw fit to stand in this House and refuse to answer questions. Well, I have news for the Prime Minister. Not only will our Conservative caucus continue to stand up and ask the tough questions, but we will force him to vote on them. We want the Prime Minister and the entire Liberal caucus to support our motion to revoke the Veterans Affairs funding that is going to pay for the private treatment of a convicted murderer, someone who never served a day in the Canadian Armed Forces, who never wore the uniform, who never served our country, and who most certainly is not entitled to any private treatment paid by Veterans Affairs.

With this motion we want the Prime Minister to send a strong message to the entire veterans community that what happened is wrong and must be fixed immediately. It will also be an opportunity for every member to be on the record as to where he or she stands, and if the member wants to fix this egregious application of Veterans Affairs policies. We have to seriously think about if we do not revoke this funding, what sort of message it will send to every veteran out there who is wondering how this could have happened.

I will quote retired sergeant Colin Saunders, who organized a protest this year on Parliament Hill over veterans benefits:

> In this circumstance, I find it really hard to chew on that we're spending taxpayers' money like that to help someone when we also have veterans that are having a really hard time getting treatment through VAC. Certainly, there's lots of veterans whose family members need help or need services and they're not getting it.

He is right. Sadly, there are those who are currently appealing decisions on why they are not receiving benefits, yet Veterans Affairs has the funding to pay for the PTSD treatment for a convicted murderer.

To stress the failure of how this happened, if the convicted murderer had in fact served in the Canadian Armed Forces, he would have been kicked out with a dishonourable discharge and probably would never have received benefits. However, in this case, because the convicted murderer was not actually a veteran, he gets to continue to receive assistance.

I will quote another veteran, Medric Cousineau, who is the founder of Paws Fur Thought, which helps place service dogs with veterans who need them. He said:

> How can you have a department who will bend over willy-nilly and yawn to support that, who will drag its feet toward supporting service dogs for veterans.

● (1350)

He is absolutely right. This is the government that had almost three years to ensure that veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder could be paired with service dogs, and we just learned there will be further delays as a result of their inaction. Our veterans deserve programs and benefits designed to meet their ever-evolving needs, and yet under the Liberal government we have seen nothing but more backlogs and delays.

The Liberals have repeatedly demonstrated they do not intend on honouring all the promises they made to veterans during the 2015 election campaign. While we are not here debating the promises the Liberals have failed to implement, we are here to rectify a very serious error in the application of veterans benefits.

This decision is wrong on so many levels, and the longer it takes to fix it, the more veterans and Canadians will continue to lose faith in the system. They are losing faith in the Prime Minister who had the gall to tell veterans, "They are asking for more than we can give."

Not only did he make that flippant remark, he refused to apologize for it. The reason that comment stung and made people's blood boil is that we see waste and out of control spending on a weekly basis. The topic of today's debate is just another example of misplaced spending that should never have happened.

While the Liberal government just wrote a $4.5-billion cheque to a Texas oil company, it has a very difficult time keeping the promises it made to our veterans, and the veterans community is paying attention. They will not soon forget the Prime Minister's comment or overlook payments to provide private treatment to a convicted murderer. They are deeply upset that after the Prime Minister promised not to take veterans to court, he did exactly that. They are angry that he did not keep his promise to establish lifelong pensions as an option for injured veterans.

While I know the Prime Minister does not like facing these tough questions, that is what Parliament is for. He can continue to throw insults and downplay the whole fiasco, but we will not stay silent. We are here to hold the government's feet to the fire and make it accountable for its actions. Shrugging this off and pretending that it does not matter will not make the problem go away. We want the funding to cease immediately, and we want the policy changed so this situation never happens again. We would be shirking our responsibilities as parliamentarians if we did not fix this in the most expeditious manner.

I implore my Liberal colleagues to vote in favour of this motion, to stand with us and send a strong message that funding meant for veterans should never go to convicted murderers. Let us be united in condemning what has transpired and pledge to never let it happen ever again.

● (1355)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Brandon—Souris will have five minutes of questions coming to him when we resume debate.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today in this place, beginning by acknowledging that we are on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

[*Translation*]

It is also a tremendous honour because, today, at the University of Victoria, a historic program is being launched.

[*English*]

The university has launched the world's first degree-granting program in indigenous law. I could not be more honoured to recognize that today. I would like to be there with them. John Borrows, who holds a Canada research chair in indigenous law, and Val Napoleon, who is also engaged with this issue as the law foundation chair in aboriginal justice and governance, are launching a program that is rooted in the earth, looking to indigenous law as well as common law to direct Canada's future.

To them, I say,

[*Member spoke in Sencoten*].

[English]

I raise my hands to them. All honour.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL COACHES WEEK

Mrs. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is national coaches week.

[*English*]

I would like to ask my honourable colleagues this week to thank their coaches for all they do for our kids and our communities. As a mother of three children who all have marvellous coaches, I have seen first-hand how important they are in shaping our youth.

[*Translation*]

Coaches work hard to help make Canada a healthy place to live.

[*English*]

Whether we are playing for fun or competing at the Olympics, our coaches are always there to support, inspire and guide us, not only in sport but in life as well. We know that most coaches are volunteers who contribute their time to help our youth from across the country to learn.

[*Translation*]

This week, it is our turn to encourage coaches. Let's all express our heartfelt thanks for everything they do.

[*English*]

For all of those reasons, we encourage all members to celebrate coaches using #ThanksCoach.

● (1400)

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that agriculture is the backbone of the Canadian economy. The International Plowing Match was held last week in Chatham-Kent near Pain Court on 850 acres of land in Lambton—Kent—Middlesex. This annual event is one of the best in Canada that celebrates our agriculture industry and provides learning experiences for urban and rural folks and thousands of school children. It would not have been possible without the help of 1,000 volunteers who dedicated time, land and resources.

In particular, I want to thank Jean Marie and Lucile Laprise, the host farmers, and the co-chairs Leon Leclair and Darrin Canniff. The IPM was a great opportunity to showcase one of the most productive agricultural areas in Canada and to talk about career opportunities in our agriculture industry. Thanks again to all of the volunteers.

* * *

WESLEY OAKE

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in memory of a truly great man, Reverend Wesley Oake, who passed away on September 16 at the age of 96. Growing up in Notre Dame Bay, Reverend Oake was one of the last World War II Veterans from Newfoundland and Labrador, having served in the 166th (Newfoundland) Field Regiment. He fought mainly in Italy, but was also active in England and Africa. He spoke openly about the time he spent serving and provided us with honest stories about and the hard truths of what wartime was like.

After serving in the war he was ordained as a minister in the United Church, for 22 years serving God and his congregation. One thing that Reverend Oake will always be remembered for is a fundraiser he held for Gander's Heritage Memorial Park. He raised $35 000 at the age of 92. At 92 he also went skydiving at 10,000 feet.

He leaves behind his wife Myrtle, whom he would have celebrated his 72nd wedding anniversary with today. We will always miss him. We give our thanks to Reverend Oake for making this country better and safe

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TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people in northeast Winnipeg are fed up with scam phone calls. They are among the thousands of Canadians who are harassed by unscrupulous con artists by phone every year. Some fall victim to these schemes, losing their life savings and their sense of trust in the world around them. My office is receiving more and more reports of these calls. The people on the line pretend to be in a position of authority and threaten legal action if their target does not agree to pay a bogus fee. Some people are getting one or more calls a day and are reaching their wits' end.

While Canadians are encouraged to report these scams to the RCMP's Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre, too often they are met with a busy signal. When that happens, the information that should help international law enforcement find and shut these guys down does not get to where it needs to go. Clearly, the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre needs more resources to do its job protecting Canadians from these ill-willed and irritating invasions of their privacy. I call on the government to do so.

* * *

DYSTONIA AWARENESS MONTH

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, September is Dystonia Awareness Month. It is estimated that 50,000 Canadians have this disease, which is the third-most common movement disorder following tremors and Parkinson's disease. Those with dystonia suffer from painful involuntary muscle contractions of any part of their body, including arms, legs, face and vocal cords. On top of this physical pain, those with dystonia often experience depression, anxiety and social phobias. There is low awareness of dystonia, and the biggest challenge can be getting the proper diagnosis. There is no known cure for the disease, but we must raise awareness of it.

This disease has been brought to my attention by a fellow Cape Bretoner, Jason Young. He was instrumental in getting the world's largest fiddle in Sydney lit up blue for the month of September to raise awareness. Those who live and fight this battle should know they are not alone. It is my hope that together we can promote, educate, and find a cure for this terrible disease.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the course of the summer I had the pleasure of speaking to thousands of constituents. One such group was the Nicaraguan community, whom I had the pleasure of meeting with recently. The situation in Nicaragua has continued to deteriorate over the past months, and the Ortega regime continues to resort to violent oppression of Nicaraguans and their rights. Enforced disappearances, assaults and even murder are tragically being employed to prevent people from protesting.

Statements and condemnation by the international community have done very little, which has frustrated many of my Nicaraguan constituents. That is why I was happy to sponsor their petition e-1804, calling on the government to sanction members of the Ortega regime under Canada's Sergei Magnitsky law. I encourage all Canadians to support this important petition and concrete steps to end the tragic events in Nicaragua.

● (1405)

[*Translation*]

FRANCO-ONTARIAN DAY

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, September 25, is Franco-Ontarian Day. For those who may not be aware, Franco-Ontarians are Canadians who live in Ontario and speak French. It is a day to celebrate the francophone community and its history, which dates back over 400 years. It is also a day to look back on our past.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Franco-Ontarians were not allowed to speak French in schools after Regulation 17 was passed, a regulation decreeing that English would be the only language of instruction in all Ontario schools. Fortunately, Franco-Ontarians fought back and created their own school system, to counteract the negative impact the regulation was having on their communities. Today, our Franco-Ontarian identity is vibrant and strong thanks to those who speak French.

* * *

FRANCO-CITÉ SECONDARY SCHOOL

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to share some amazing news about a recent achievement by Franco-Cité, my old high school.

[*English*]

They beat out 1,400 applicants from Canada and the U.S. in being selected as the recipients of the Riddell 18 in 18 smarter football program. The school was offered congratulations by arguably one of the NFL's greatest quarterbacks, Mr. Peyton Manning.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Manning is the program's ambassador, and he personally sent a video congratulating the school on winning the grant.

[*English*]

The smarter football program is a grassroots movement that recognizes and rewards teams for implementing smarter tactics on and off the field. I wish to congratulate the faculty and the students at Franco-Cité.

[*Translation*]

On behalf of everyone here, I want to wish the best of luck in the year ahead to Franco-Cité, the high school of choice for francophone athletes.

Go Patriotes, and happy Franco-Ontarian Day.

* * *

[*English*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the evening of August 29, RCMP corporal Graeme Kingdon was shot while responding with his partner to a reported break and enter at a rural property near Onanole, Manitoba. Corporal Kingdon was transported by ambulance and then in a STARS helicopter to receive treatment in Winnipeg. Fortunately, the gunshot wound was not life threatening and he is now back at home with his family.

Many people deserve recognition for their work that day: the emergency medical responders, STARS Air Ambulance, the Riding Mountain National Park wardens, the rural municipality of Harrison Park, and the RCMP communications team. I also want to acknowledge the strength of local residents who rallied in support of their community during this dire time, and law enforcement officers.

Finally, I need to recognize the many brave RCMP officers who conducted a dangerous manhunt through the night, resulting in the arrest of four suspects. I am grateful for the bravery of each of them, along with Corporal Graeme Kingdon and all the other officers in my constituency. I want to thank them for all that they do to protect our communities.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NEW BRUNSWICK ELECTION

Mr. Matt DeCourcey (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to offer my sincere thanks to all New Brunswickers who participated in last night's successful provincial election.

First of all, I want to congratulate all the candidates for their hard work over the past few weeks. I also want to thank all the poll workers for being there for our candidates and political parties. Lastly, I want to thank all the volunteers who worked so hard over the past few weeks.

[*English*]

Volunteers help our candidates so much during an election campaign. Volunteers donate their hard-earned dollars, volunteers make sandwiches and cook dinner, and volunteers provide energy and support for candidates who are tired as they knock on doors and make phone calls. Everyone in the chamber I know appreciates the work of volunteers who support them on the campaign trail.

To our volunteers, *merci beaucoup*.

* * *

GENDER EQUALITY WEEK

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for this first Gender Equality Week, I decided to capture the thoughts of some young people on its benefits. Johnny Chavannes, a fifth grader from Jack Miner Public School, who happens to be my son, said that Gender Equality Week allows us to ensure that all people are recognized for what they do for Canada and that people can be successful no matter their gender.

Fae Johnstone, a fierce transfeminine and non-binary Twitter follower of mine, said that it is an opportunity to applaud the progress that we have made, but also to be honest about surviving and thriving under the harsh realities of patriarchy, transphobia and other forms of oppression, and to ensure that the voices and realities of gender-diverse and marginalized communities are central in the fight for gender equality.

Lastly, Brianne Olu-Cole, a grade 6 female student at Captain Michael VandenBos Public School, said that this week is important so that society will know that no gender is superior to another and that we are all equal. Our young people get it.

Happy Gender Equality Week.

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● (1410)

CATHERINE CAMPBELL

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week we celebrate just that, women's equality, and Conservatives are proud advocates of the equal and fair treatment of women.

As we celebrate this important week, however, we are confronted by a very grave atrocity that the Liberal government fails to acknowledge. The Prime Minister has signed off on giving veterans benefits to a man who viciously killed an off-duty police officer. Over and over again in question period, the Liberals continue to defend Chris Garnier, the killer, a man who brutally murdered off-duty police officer Catherine Campbell.

During Gender Equality Week, we should be celebrating women like Catherine, a young woman who overcame barriers in order to work in the male-dominated field of law enforcement. Catherine served her community as a volunteer firefighter for 10 years and as a role model to many people, women and men alike.

In defence of equality, Conservatives will continue to call upon the government to respect the memory of Catherine Campbell. We ask the government to reverse its decision to grant veterans funding to the man who brutally took her life.

* * *

VETERAN

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour Mr. Hedley Lake, a resident of Fortune in my riding. Mr. Lake is a decorated Second World War veteran, who celebrated his 100th birthday on August 12.

Mr. Lake was in active military service for five years, from 1940 to 1945. After two years of service in the Mediterranean Sea, he went home for leave. On his journey home, Mr. Lake was aboard the SS *Caribou* when it was attacked by a German U-boat on October 14, 1942, and sank in the Cabot Strait. Mr. Lake went on to serve in the invasions of Sicily, Salerno, Anzio and Normandy, and at the end of the war in Europe, he volunteered to go to the Pacific, but his request was not granted and he was told, "We think you've had enough."

On behalf of all the residents of Bonavista—Burin—Trinity and, indeed, all Canadians, I want to thank Mr. Hedley Lake for his service and wish him all the best in his 100th year.

* * *

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in May 2016, I warned the government to protect Canadians from CRA telephone scams from India. Its inaction is obscene.

The government has over 60,000 recorded complaints about fraudulent calls from criminals impersonating CRA agents, demanding payment and threatening legal action, even incarceration. Millions of dollars have been scammed, but still nothing has been done by the Liberals. They never do the hard work.

While the Prime Minister was in India, he was more concerned about the optics of his junket and his dress, rather than doing anything to protect Canadians from fraudsters and organized criminals stealing money from Canadians. Why did he not raise this issue?

The Minister of Public Safety's indifference and incompetence with respect to Canadians' privacy and protecting these victims of scams is nothing short of scandalous and out of touch. I encourage all Canadians to call the minister at 613-947-1153 to do something about this.

* * *

NEW BRUNSWICK ELECTION

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Blaine Higgs and the Progressive Conservative Party of New Brunswick on winning 22 seats last night, the most seats in the legislature.

I, like other Canadians, were watching this election closely. We see this as proof that New Brunswickers stand with Saskatchewan, Ontario and Manitoba, and would fight against the Prime Minister's carbon tax. This election is evidence that the people of New Brunswick will not be bystanders. They used their voices and chose to fight back against an unfair tax.

Blaine Higgs and his entire Progressive Conservative team worked tirelessly over the campaign trail, putting New Brunswickers first, and committed to meet their environmental obligations without digging deeper into the taxpayer's pocket.

We look forward to working with them.

* * *

● (1415)

[*Translation*]

FRANCO-ONTARIAN DAY

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, September 25 is Franco-Ontarian Day.

Today, I got to celebrate this great day with the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism at L'Escale Catholic high school in Rockland. Our ancestors would be proud to see the initiative and creativity that our school boards show in organizing these celebrations.

We have come a long way since Regulation 17, since the creation of our school boards and the battle to preserve Montfort Hospital, but we need to stay resilient.

I want to thank organizations like the Prescott-Russell ACFO, the Francophone Assembly of Ontario, the CALACS, our school boards, and all the partners that play a vital role in preserving and promoting our Franco-Ontarian communities.

Today, I saw first-hand that the students of L'Escale and Ontario are ready to take up the torch and secure our place for a better future.

Happy Franco-Ontarian Day.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's record on veterans affairs is abysmal.

First, he forced veterans back to court in order to prevent having to pay them the benefits he promised. Then he left over $300 million in funding unspent on veterans services. The backlog for veterans waiting to have their benefits processed has risen by over 50%. To add disgusting insult to that injury, the department is now using veterans' money on a convicted killer.

Will the Prime Minister finally do the right thing and cancel these benefits for this killer?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the health and well-being of our veterans is our top priority.

I have reviewed the department's findings on this issue and I am directing it to ensure that the services received by a family member of a veteran are related to the veteran's service and where they are not, that the case be reviewed by a senior official.

I am directing the department to immediately address its policy of providing treatment to family members under extenuating circumstances, such as conviction of such a serious crime.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the summer has passed, and after the Prime Minister guaranteed that the Trans Mountain project would be started this summer, the thousands of out-of-work energy workers in the country have been left disappointed.

We are now nearing the end of September. The Prime Minister promised that he would introduce legislation that would allow the Trans Mountain project to be built. Will he introduce that legislation today?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we heard yesterday from the Leader of the Opposition was the failed policies of the Harper era.

The decade of failure was completely demonstrated yesterday when the Leader of the Opposition showed complete disregard for the courts, complete disregard for the environment and complete disregard for the consultation with indigenous peoples.

We are focused on getting this project back on track in the right way.

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. opposition House leader of course knows that her side has other turns, so I would ask her to wait for those and allow those who have the floor to speak and not be interrupted.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister well knows that the previous Conservative government saw four major pipeline approvals, approved and built under our government.

However, that was not the question. The question was this. The Prime Minister guaranteed that this project would be started this summer. He also promised legislation that would provide a path for the Trans Mountain project to be built. It is now the end of September. Will the Prime Minister introduce that legislation today?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the failed record of the Harper government to build a single pipeline to expand our global non-U.S. markets.

When Conservatives got into office in 2006, 99% of Alberta's oil was sold to the United States. When they left office in 2015, 99% of Alberta's oil was sold to the United States.

We are focused on expanding our global market so we can create more jobs for the middle class, so we can get a proper price for Alberta's oil and continue to grow our economy in the way that—

● (1420)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we the Conservatives believe that the Trans Mountain project is essential and urgently needed for Canada's economy.

What has the Liberal government been doing about this in the past few months? It took $4.5 billion of taxpayers' money and sent it to Houston. Then, what did it do? Nothing at all. It was pleased that the project was delayed. What a Liberal failure.

Could the Liberal government at least give us a date? When will the work on Trans Mountain begin?

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand that the investment in Trans Mountain pipeline project is in the national interest. That is why we are moving forward on this project in the right way, making sure that we are respecting our obligations to meaningfully consult with indigenous peoples and at the same time having a plan in place that allows us to protect the coastal communities and allows us to take action on the effects of tanker traffic on the marine environment.

We are committed to getting this project in the right way.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, you saw as I did that he has no idea when the government will start work on Trans Mountain. The reason is quite simple: the Prime Minister does not believe in Canada's energy potential. The Prime Minister despises Alberta's oil and Canada's entire energy sector. In fact he even wants to get rid of it.

Yesterday, we brought forward positive, constructive and realistic proposals. Will the government agree to our proposal to use its declaratory power and immediately establish that the pipeline is a project in the national interest?

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for years the previous government cut corners, disregarded environmental regulations and ignored the indigenous people's right to be meaningfully consulted. The result: Not a single pipeline built to get our resources to the global market.

We are going to do things differently. We are going to consult with indigenous people. We are going to make sure that we are taking action on protecting coastal communities and taking action to ensure that the impact of the tanker traffic is meaningfully and properly considered. That is what—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for the Prime Minister, "enough is enough". That was the message being delivered to the government from the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs. It is calling on the Prime Minister to cancel his directive to redo his failed process on the Trans Mountain expansion.

Doubling down on getting through the same flawed process to obtain the court's fair minimum standard does not qualify as a meaningful consultation. Do Liberals understand that it takes much more to meaningfully consult with indigenous peoples?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government understands that no relationship is more important to our government than the relationship with indigenous peoples.

We have committed to moving forward on this project in the right way. We have instructed the NEB to undertake the review that was denied by the previous Conservative government to factor in the impact of the marine shipping on the marine environment. We will be announcing the rest of the plan very shortly.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is rhetoric, like the minister's response, and there are also the facts.

Ultimately, we have before us two parties that want the Trans Mountain project to continue at any cost. Both want to either do the bare minimum in response to the Federal Court of Appeal's ruling, or do away with consultations of indigenous communities, which is even worse.

Neither one intends to hold meaningful consultations to address those who may have to live with a pipeline in their backyard and the risk of spills for the rest of their lives.

What will it take for the government to understand that indigenous peoples have rights over their lands?

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issue that the member from the NDP is not focused on is that we need to make sure we are expanding our global market for our natural resources. That is why it is very important that we do it in the right way, which includes meaningful consultation with indigenous communities, at the same time making sure we are protecting our environment and that we are looking after the issues that the court has identified.

It is very important that we reduce our dependency on the single customer we have, which is the United States, to sell our oil resources.

● (1425)

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister insists that this pipeline expansion will be done no matter what and his minister adds that Canada will not be able to accommodate all indigenous concerns, it means they have decided to willfully violate their constitutional duties and obligations. It sounds like a most important relationship, does it not?

Why does the Prime Minister not just say the truth and tell indigenous peoples that he does not give a fuck about their rights?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou is an experienced member and knows that is unparliamentary language. I would ask him to withdraw the word and apologize.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Speaker, what is going on right now is so insulting that it is making my blood boil. I am sorry. I withdraw that word. I am truly sorry.

The Speaker: I sincerely thank the hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Natural Resources.

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have a tremendous amount of respect for indigenous Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Since being appointed to this department, I have been reaching out to indigenous leaders, even before the court's decision, and I will continue to do so.

As I said earlier, there is no relationship more important to our government than the relationship with indigenous peoples. We will move forward on this project in the right way, making sure we are meeting our constitutional obligations to meaningfully consult with indigenous peoples.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, well, this certainly does not feel like respect to many indigenous communities across the country. The Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs is calling for the Prime Minister to accept the Federal Court's decision once and for all and cancel the expansion of this disastrous Trans Mountain pipeline and tanker project.

How can the government stand in the House in our country and say that this is its most important relationship?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like all other Canadians, there are diverse views among indigenous peoples on the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion. We respect and value that.

A number of first nations communities have signed benefit agreements because they see the value of this project. Other communities are against it. We will work with all of them. We understand that trying to build a consensus is important for a project such as this to move forward in the right way.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Christopher Garnier was convicted of second-degree murder when he murdered a female police officer by the name of Catherine Campbell. Apparently, he now suffers from PTSD as a result of committing the murder.

Veterans Affairs Canada is paying for services for Mr. Garnier. The murderer has been put to the front of the line, while the men and women who served our country are not receiving benefits because they are still waiting.

Will the Minister of Veterans Affairs do the right thing and cancel the benefits Mr. Garnier is receiving?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is moments like this that our commitment to our veterans is tested. We cannot discuss the treatment of this individual without discussing the treatment of the father, without discussing the treatment of the veteran.

I stand before the House as someone who will not infringe upon the privacy of that veteran. We all know, because of its track record, what that side of the House would have us do because it did it before. It played with veterans health records like it was playing cards. We will not. Even in these most trying times, we will not.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, well, what can I say? On August 31, the Minister of Veterans Affairs indicated that he was going to ask his department what had happened and get to the bottom of it. He told a newspaper reporter that. It has taken 25 days to get to the bottom of this.

I served as a minister. As a result, I know one can get this information in 24 hours, not in 24 days.

I want to know this very specifically. Will people who are receiving benefits who have committed heinous crimes like murder have their payments taken away retroactively?

● (1430)

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I cannot discuss this case. I cannot discuss this case without infringing upon the privacy of a veteran. I will not play games with veterans. Even in this most trying and egregious of times, when the son of a veteran is a convicted cop killer, I will not turn my back on that veteran.

For any veteran who is watching this debate, I will let them know this government, even under the most extenuating of circumstances, will not turn its back on veterans.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2017, Christopher Garnier was convicted of murdering police officer Catherine Campbell. Mr. Garnier is currently receiving benefits from Veterans Affairs Canada even though he is in prison and has never served in the Canadian Armed Forces. This is a disgrace to our country, an outrage to veterans, and an insult to the memory of Constable Catherine Campbell.

Will the Prime Minister take responsibility, show some leadership, and put an end to this situation right now?

[*English*]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, even in this most extenuating of circumstances, we will stand by our veterans. We have shown that time and again when we increased benefits for veterans. We have increased services. We have reopened offices. We have increased staff. We have given them back their ID cards.

We will continue to show respect for veterans, even in this most trying of times.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts are simple. Veterans Affairs Canada is currently paying for Christopher Garnier's treatment even though he murdered Constable Catherine Campbell. That is nothing short of appalling.

The Campbell family is angry, our veterans are angry, Canadians are angry, and we are angry. It is outrageous.

The Prime Minister has the power to end this injustice right now. What is he waiting for?

[*English*]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is outrageous. Many people in the House have expressed their outrage. Canadians have expressed their outrage. However, our outrage will not factor into the treatment of veterans. Our outrage should not factor into justice and into laws.

We will stand by our veterans, even now. Even in the most extenuating of circumstances, we will stand by our veterans.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, the comments in the debate around the Chris Garnier case show a clear lack of leadership and the ability the minister and the Prime Minister have to intervene and stop this outrageous situation, where this murderer is receiving veterans benefits. This is not a theatre today for the minister to pat himself on the back. This is a place where we ask him to solve ths now or resign.

● (1435)

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for 10 years, the House was used as a place where people on that side of the House cut benefits, cut services, closed offices, cut staff and took away an ID card from veterans. We will continue to stand by our veterans. We will continue to rebuild a department that was near—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Brantford—Brant.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister continues to defend the indefensible on the Garnier case.

Catherine Campbell was brutally murdered, put into a compost bin and dumped under a bridge. This is a one-off situation. This is a mistake by Veterans Affairs to make this decision in the first place, yet he and the Prime Minister will not even speak to the issue of addressing it, as Canadians are demanding, especially veterans.

If he is not willing to do this, it is his place in the House to resign his position.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we cannot discuss the details of this case without discussing the case of the veteran, and we will not. I will not discuss the case of this veteran. We will stand by veterans in the country, even in the most extenuating of circumstances, even in the most egregious of circumstances, even in these circumstances where the son of a veteran is convicted of killing a police officer. Even now, we will stand with that veteran.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the Liberals bought Trans Mountain, they also bought the Puget Sound pipeline that sends oil to the United States. The State of Washington's Department of Ecology is worried. It has been critical of the deficiencies in the spill contingency plan. It wants to know what will happen if heavy bitumen sinks to the sea floor and endangers species like salmon or killer whales. The department even gave an ultimatum. It is giving the Liberals 60 days to correct the situation. Even the Americans find the Liberals' environmental plan frightening. This is not a laughing matter.

When will the Liberals take environmental protection seriously?

[*English*]

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, environmental sustainability is at the heart of everything this government does.

The decision with respect to the Trans Mountain pipeline originally was based on an assessment with respect to the environmental considerations. We have done an enormous amount of work with respect to issues associated with diluted bitumen and spills potentially in the water. We have done an enormous amount of work on ensuring we are protecting the coast, preventing spills. We have done an enormous amount of work on recovering the killer whales and working to ensure that the measures that are being put into place will more than mitigate the impact of the excess tanker traffic.

This project is being done in an environmentally responsible way that advances Canada's economic interests.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the Liberals bought a 65-year-old leaky pipeline, most Canadians thought they definitely would have a super-duper cleanup plan in case of an oil spill. Well, apparently not.

Washington state is raising the alarm, saying the Liberals emergency plan has major "deficiencies in critical areas" to protect salmon and whales. It is like the Liberals went out and bought a 1972 Pinto, with no airbags, no seat belts, and said "Kids, hop in. Let's go for a ride." No parent would do this.

Why did the Liberals burden Canadians with this old pipeline? They did not even bother to keep the receipt for $4.5 billion, and they do not have an emergency plan to clean up a spill.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, some in the House like to engage in theatre; we like to engage in facts.

We have done the work to ensure that the process can be handled in an environmentally sustainable way. The oceans protection plan is addressing concerns with respect to snow prevention, concerns with respect to snow response.

We have released three peer review studies with respect to the impact on marine environment. We have done an enormous amount to ensure that we are protecting the marine environment, killer whales and other species.

This project is being done. It has been constructed in an environmentally responsible way. We are balancing the economy and the environment, ensuring that both—

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Order. I would ask the hon. member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert to calm down and not interrupt.

[*English*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Christopher Garnier brutally murdered an off-duty police officer by the name of Catherine Campbell.

During sentencing, the judge stated, "Mr. Garnier punched her in the face, broke her nose, strangled her to death, and...treated her remains like garbage."

The Prime Minister claims to be a champion of women's rights. Why then has he signed off on granting veterans benefits to a man who never, ever served a single day in the Canadian Armed Forces, but killed an off-duty female police officer? Why is that okay?

● (1440)

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my heart goes out to the family of Constable Campbell. It should not have to endure this case being brought up for political expediency. It should not have to endure this.

We will continue to stand by our veterans, as we have every day in the House for the past three years.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for two weeks now, we have been asking the government questions about Christopher Garnier, a criminal who is receiving benefits intended for our brave veterans. The Liberals' record is filled with nothing but failures and inaction. The Conservatives took a leadership role when serial killer Clifford Olson was receiving old age security benefits. We put an end to those benefits.

When will the Minister of Veterans Affairs take responsibility? When will he step in and put an end to these benefits?

[*English*]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, even in the face of political expediency, we will stand by our veterans.

We have spent $10 billion in three years on our veterans and their families. We have increased benefits. We have increased services. We have increased staff. We have reopened offices. We have given them back their ID cards.

Even in the most trying of circumstances, we will stand with our veterans.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals may stand beside Chris Garnier, but we will stand with the victim and her family in this case. Chris Garnier is 30 years old. He never served a single day in the Canadian Armed Forces, yet the Liberal government is using veterans benefits to pay for his PTSD therapy, PTSD that he developed because of how he killed the victim.

The Prime Minister has had a month to end this outrage. When will he finally do the right thing and guarantee that not a single cent more will go to Chris Garnier?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, those on the other side of the House had 10 years to do better by our veterans and I wish we could only accuse them of inaction as that might have been easier, but it was not inaction—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I would ask the hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound not to keep interrupting. In spite of how strongly people feel on these subjects, we have to have debate that allows one side to speak at a time to show respect for this institution and this place.

The hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs has 20 seconds left.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Mr. Speaker, for 10 years they stood time and time again and cut benefits. They cut services. They closed offices. They cut staff and they even took away their ID cards. I wish we could accuse them of inaction.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are not talking about a veteran. We are talking about a 30-year-old murderer who never spent a day in uniform.

The Prime Minister could have ended these payments with the stroke of a pen. Instead, he endorsed them.

We know where the Prime Minister stands, but tonight every member of the House will be given an opportunity to tell Canadians where they stand. Will a single Liberal member of Parliament stand up for what is right or will the Liberals endorse the Prime Minister's plan of paying veterans benefits to convicted murderers?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indeed, one of the people at the centre of this is a veteran and that veteran's family. Even in the most extenuating of circumstances, we will stand with that veteran as we have stood with veterans every day when we have voted for increases to veterans benefits, to veterans services, when we have reopened offices, when we have increased staff.

Every time that we vote, we vote on the side of veterans even in the most trying of circumstances.

* * *

● (1445)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians expect the Liberals to secure a new NAFTA that defends our jobs in key sectors. A new poll shows Canadians also want a deal that defends access to affordable prescription medications, but according to reports, negotiators are considering U.S. proposals that would lead to higher drug costs for Canadians and for public drug plans.

I think of my constituent, Cheryl. Every year she must pay thousands of dollars out of pocket for heart and blood pressure medication. Will the Prime Minister commit that NAFTA 2.0 will not raise the cost of drugs for Canadians?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know how proud Canadians are of our public health care system and we are going to defend it. We also know that the affordability of and access to prescription drugs remains an important issue for all Canadians. We will continue to work with the provinces, territories and our partners to lower drug prices and provide timely access to medicines. This is an important issue for our government and we have said such during the NAFTA discussions. Our government will always stand up for Canadians.

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INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thanks to our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Canadian courts have given women the right to choose, the right to medical assistance in dying, LGBTQ2 rights, collective bargaining rights and more. While the notwithstanding clause is part of the charter, so far it has always been used sparingly, but maybe no longer.

Canadians are telling me how disappointed they are that the Liberals refuse to even study the use of the clause which lets legislatures override their rights. We want to know why the Liberals will not allow even a study of the notwithstanding clause so we can better protect the charter rights of Canadians.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has been very clear. We think the notwithstanding clause should only be considered in the most exceptional of circumstances. We think that the government's responsibility is to stand up for the charter rights of Canadians. That is something this government will always do.

We have expressed publicly our dismay when the Government of Ontario was considering using the notwithstanding clause. Our Toronto caucus stood firmly against that decision. We will continue to defend the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

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[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today being Franco-Ontarian day, we join Ontario francophones and francophiles in celebrating their culture, their language and their traditions.

The Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie visited a school in Orleans to make an excellent announcement for schools: establishing minority communities in Ontario.

Would the minister tell the House more about this announcement?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Nickel Belt.

I would like to join him in celebrating Franco-Ontarian Day, which is why I am wearing green and white today.

This morning I was at École élémentaire catholique Notre-Dame-des-Champs, where I got to meet 300 students and announce $7.5 million in funding to give students at 700 francophone schools and 300 anglophone schools in minority communities access to cultural activities.

This government believes in our official languages and in our children.

* * *

[*English*]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after a summer of failures, the Prime Minister still has no plan to get Trans Mountain built.

The Conservatives unveiled their plan: complete indigenous consultations immediately; enact emergency legislation; request a stay and appeal the Federal Court ruling; and pass Bill S-245, clarifying that a pipeline is under federal jurisdiction.

We have a plan while the Liberals just delay. Will the government adopt the Conservative plan and bring jobs and investment back to Canada?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after a decade of failure, the official opposition is still repeating the same thing it has done for a decade: a complete disregard for the Federal Court's ruling; a complete disregard with respect to taking action on environmental sustainability, including the protection of the coastal communities; and a complete disregard for engaging indigenous peoples in a meaningful dialogue.

We are going to move forward on this project in the right way, by responding to the issues that are relevant to this decision. I will be announcing that plan very shortly.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Trans Mountain pipeline is critical to the 43 first nations with benefit agreements and many others. Yesterday, the leader of Canada's Conservatives announced a comprehensive plan that makes use of every tool in the tool box to get this pipeline built. This includes meaningful consultation with indigenous peoples, which the Liberals did not do when they simply sent a note-taker. When will the Liberals show some leadership and announce a real plan instead of dithering along like they have been?

● (1450)

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government understands that getting our natural resources to global non-U.S. markets is very important for creating jobs and growing the economy. We are going to do that in a responsible way. That responsible way is by making sure that we are respecting the environment, taking action on protecting our marine environment, while at the same time having meaningful consultation with indigenous peoples.

We recognize there is a diversity of opinions among indigenous peoples. We respect that and we will continue to work with all of them.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives unveiled our plan to build the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion to the public yesterday. Our plan addresses all of the risks to build this pipeline.

The Liberals have a choice. They can continue to delay this project and in doing so continue their record of failure, or they can follow the Conservatives' plan and use every tool available to them to get this pipeline built.

When will the minister start doing his job, get Canadians back to work, and get the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion project under way?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the Conservatives announced yesterday was a dissertation on a decade of failure, which is to ignore the direction from the court, to ignore the court in this regard, to disregard the environment, and disregard the consultations with indigenous peoples. If they had followed the proper procedure, they probably would have built a pipeline to get our resources to the global market.

We sell 99% of our oil to one customer, which is the United States. We need to diversify our natural resource markets, and we are going to do that in the proper and right way—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Foothills.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pipeline companies invest billions of dollars in consultants and environmental assessments, and that is just to table their proposal. They made these investments under Conservative governments because they knew the Conservatives would champion these projects. However, under the Liberals' watch, not one single major piece of oil infrastructure has been proposed, and that is in three years.

When will the Liberals understand that their failed policies are not getting one inch of pipeline built? When will they do their job and get the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion moving?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it would be beneficial for the member to understand that the decision made in 2014 to exclude from the NEB the review of marine shipping and its impact on the environment was done under the Harper government. The record has been very clear that that was the wrong decision to make. We are going to correct that.

We have directed the NEB to consider the impact of marine shipping on the marine environment, and we are going to move forward on this project in the right way. We understand that Canadian jobs and protecting the environment go—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway.

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HEALTH

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thousands of Canadian families have lost loved ones to an overdose epidemic the government has failed to stem.

Health professionals, Canada's chief public health officer, the president of the Canadian Medical Association, big city mayors and police chiefs all want to decriminalize and regulate substance use to save lives.

Instead, today we see the Prime Minister sign on to the failed war on drugs approach demanded by Donald Trump. Are the Liberals truly so desperate for a new NAFTA that they are prepared to put Canadian lives at risk to get it?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, protecting the health and safety of Canadians is my top priority.

We are in a national public health crisis when it comes to the opioid epidemic, and we have seen the tragic numbers that were released last week. The numbers are more than numbers; these are lives of Canadians.

Substance abuse is an international problem and the global call for action will help us move forward. One hundred and thirty countries have signed on to the declaration, and we certainly want to be a part of that conversation. If we are not at the table, we certainly will not be able to effect change.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, much to the surprise of experts and the international community, the Liberals endorsed President Trump's devastating war on drugs.

Meanwhile, President Trump was before the United Nations saying that the United States would not support multilateralism, was going to make cuts to international aid and would oppose the International Criminal Court. He does not even want to promote human rights any more.

Rather than trying to cozy up to the Trump administration, will the Liberals stand up and condemn the American President's dangerous rhetoric?

● (1455)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my top priority as health minister is to protect the health and safety of Canadians. We are currently in the midst of an opioid crisis. This is a national crisis.

The numbers we saw last week were absolutely tragic, and they are not just numbers. Those numbers represent the lives that have been lost here in Canada.

The use of illegal substances is a global issue. An international call to action will help us to move forward. More than 130 countries signed the pledge. We recognize that Canada and a number of other countries have different approaches. We cannot make changes if those countries are not at the table.

[*English*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the Minister of Veterans Affairs has been doubling down on his ridiculous answers to our questions, his department has gone out during question period and stated that going forward, Veterans Affairs will no longer provide treatment to any veteran's family member who is in federal or provincial prison.

However, the minister has stood here for days, for 29 days, and not answered this question, and the question is this: Will he rescind the benefits to Chris Garnier?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot talk about this case without talking about the case of the veteran, and I will stand by that veteran. I will stand by that veteran even under the most excruciating of circumstances, where a family member has committed such an egregious crime. Even then, this government will stand by him.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister's department has gone forward and given the exact opposite answer.

We are asking a very simple question here. They have said that going forward there will be no benefits to people who are in federal prison. The minister has to come up with an answer to this.

Will the minister rescind the benefits for the cop killer, Chris Garnier?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will stand by the veteran who is at the centre of this case. Our support for that veteran is unwavering. Even now, even in the most extenuating of circumstances, we will stand by that veteran.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no veteran at the centre of this case. The person at the centre of this case is Christopher Garnier, the man who murdered Catherine Campbell. He interfered with her dead body. He is receiving money from Veterans Affairs Canada when he did not serve for a single minute.

Will the government ask him to pay back the money he was given, yes or no?

[*English*]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the 40-plus town halls that I have done across this country with veterans and their families, I can say I know the cost of 10 years of not just neglect but malice toward our veterans and their families. I wish we had seen more of that indignation that we see today over the 10 years that those people had to do right by our veterans and our families.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is proud to have a feminist foreign policy. Gender equality produces greater prosperity and a more peaceful and secure world. At the Women Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Montreal, the Minister of Foreign Affairs reaffirmed Canada's international leadership in promoting women's empowerment, gender equality, peace and security. Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs update the House on this important announcement?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Etobicoke Centre for his tireless work on this issue. Our government knows that women are powerful agents for change and for peace, and we also know that when women are involved in the peace process, peace agreements tend to last longer. That is why the Minister of Foreign Affairs was proud to announce the creation of an ambassador for women, peace and security. Women's empowerment is a crucial issue and I hope all of my colleagues in this House will join us in celebrating this important announcement.

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[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have asked the Minister of National Defence and the Prime Minister three times now to fix the fiasco threatening the integrity of the King's Bastion at the Quebec Citadel. According to the government's own experts, this is a safety issue, as the structure could collapse. Its architects are recommending using the original stone.

Why is the government using American, non-compliant, sub-standard stone? It shows utter contempt not only for Quebeckers but also for our Canadian heritage.

● (1500)

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we value the rich heritage of the Citadelle in Quebec City, so let me be clear: We will repair the fort using original Citadelle stones. In cases where damage to the original stone is too severe, a Quebec bidder has been contracted to ensure additional stones meet strict regulations. National defence is doing its work to make sure this stone follows the requirements because we understand how important this is to Quebec City.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the pay gap between men and women is 32%. It is even worse for women with disabilities, indigenous women and racialized women. Women are done waiting. We want economic justice now. However, every day we hear heartbreaking stories about women in poverty with the same root cause: no pay equity. If Liberals were serious about gender equality, why are women still waiting for the proactive pay equity legislation they have been promised for 42 years?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member opposite that equal pay for work of equal value is a human right, and that is why we are so proud as a government to be moving forward with proactive pay equity legislation. It is a key way that we are demonstrating our commitment to gender equality. It is a key way that we will attempt to close the gender wage gap. We are already working diligently. Consultations have been done and we will be moving forward with pay equity legislation later this year.

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SPORTS

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week is National Coaches Week, a week to recognize coaches from coast to coast to coast and the incredible contributions to athletes, families and communities. I would like to thank all coaches in my riding of Brampton North, including my son's soccer coach, for their dedication and countless hours of helping our youth and athletes learn, train and succeed.

[*Translation*]

I want to thank them for supporting children and young athletes throughout their lives.

[*English*]

Could the Minister of Science and Sport tell this House how important coaches are to the communities in Canada?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science and Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, happy National Coaches Week. All over Canada, coaches give their time to help athletes and youth succeed in sport and in life. Coaches are supporters, motivators and role models. They help athletes to dream, set goals, believe in themselves and reach their full potential. Today, I ask all members of the House to join me and thank the coaches they know, by using #thankscoach.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is increasingly evident that the Liberal environment and energy policy is an unmitigated disaster. The Liberal carbon tax has been resoundingly rejected as just a tax on Canadians that will have literally no impact on global emissions. Even with significant Canadian taxpayer dollars spent, there is a broad consensus that we will still not meet our greenhouse gas emission commitments.

Will the government confirm today that despite all of its bluster, it will not in fact meet our Paris Agreement targets?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government is confident that it is going to meet its Paris Agreement targets. The hon. member seemingly has not read the report from Stephen Harper's former director of policy that indicated that when we put a price on pollution, it is going to have an economic benefit for middle-class Canadian families.

I invite the hon. member to get on board instead of taking money out of his constituents' pockets so that he can make pollution free again.

[*Translation*]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, the Minister of Border Security claimed that the vast majority of the 35,000 irregular border crossers have since left Canada. He then admitted in the end that it was closer to 1% of them. The problem in that situation is that the rest of those individuals are waiting because their files have simply not been processed.

Does anyone in the government know anything about this situation? Does anyone have the authority to do anything on the immigration file?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we think it is important to start with the facts. As a government, we make evidence-based decisions, and the data show that the number of border crossers intercepted is lower than it was last year.

As a government, we think it is important to uphold Canadian laws and work with our partners, including the Government of Quebec, respect our commitments and make the safety of Canadians our top priority. That is exactly what we are doing.

● (1505)

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in April, the government promised Quebec that it would have a migrant triage plan within a week. In May, it told us that we would have to wait a few more weeks. At the end of July, it told us that the plan was almost ready. Today, there is still no plan, and Quebec is still waiting to be reimbursed nearly $100 million for social services expenses for last year alone.

I will repeat my colleague's question: does anyone really have the authority to do anything on the immigration file?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. My colleague, the Minister of Border Security and I have had some extremely encouraging conversations with the Government of Quebec and other partners. We acknowledged the government's obligation to reimburse the expenses incurred by our partners, including the Government of Quebec, for providing temporary housing for example. I myself have had several very encouraging discussions.

Quebec has been a key partner for our government and we will continue to work with our partners.

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the urgent warnings from climate scientists are increasingly punctuated by extreme weather events, whether forest fires, floods, hurricanes or tornadoes. However, the government is prepared to spend far more on pipelines than on climate action. It is as though we really believe in reconciliation for indigenous people but first we need to build a few more residential schools.

Will the government instruct the National Energy Board to include climate impacts of the pipeline we now own, as it did for private sector energy east?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we were elected on a commitment to grow the economy and protect the environment at the same time. This means we are going to take steps to get our resources to new markets while we still take steps to protect our environment and meet our Paris Agreement commitments. I note, in particular, that we are moving forward with a price on pollution that will reduce emissions. We are investing in clean technology and we have put $1.5 billion into our oceans protection plan to protect our oceans and waterways.

As a coastal MP in an area that the hon. member is very familiar with, this is a commitment we share and I look forward to continuing to partner with her to move forward.

* * *

PRESENCE IN THE GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the recipients of the 2019 Indspire Awards:

Barbara Todd Hager, Grand Chief Ronald Derrickson, Jijjuu Mary Snowshoe, Dr. Vianne Timmons, Dr. Marlyn Cook, Dianne Corbiere, Peter Dinsdale, Brigette Lacquette, Billy-Ray Belcourt, Kelly Fraser, James Lavallée and Atoat Akittirq.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1510)

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—VETERANS AFFAIRS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today in the House to talk about this very important topic. I want to start my remarks by expressing my sympathy for Constable Catherine Campbell. This was a heinous tragedy and a crime that was committed on her. It is fair to say that the nation feels for her family and what they have had to endure since her tragic death.

I also want to take the opportunity to talk about military personnel writ large. I have the opportunity to serve the constituents of Kingston and the Islands, where we have a military base. I have been surrounded by military personnel my whole life and have had the opportunity to engage with them from time to time. However, it was not until I became a member of the Standing Committee on National Defence that I really gained an appreciation of why our military personnel, throughout the world, have the incredible reputation they do. Those who have had the opportunity to engage with our military in various parts of the world will have seen that they deserve and command a certain level of respect from others they engage with.

Quite often, we tend to think that it is the politicians and policies we make and have made throughout the years that have given Canada this great reputation of being peacekeepers and peace builders throughout the world, but it is in fact our military folks who have been instrumental in extending the Canadian way to others and imparting upon people what it means to be Canadian and the values we stand for. It is our military personnel who really give us the distinction of what we have come to be so proud of, which is peacekeeping abilities. Politicians will come and go, but it is our military personnel who last throughout generations in various parts of the world who truly give Canada the amazing name it has.

The motion we are debating today is very timely, and I am glad to be able to speak to it. We have the opportunity to speak specifically to where we have come as a government on the veterans file, where we were before that and what we plan to see in the future. I would preface my comments by saying that there is, is my opinion, never enough we can do for our veterans. Our veterans have given us the incredible quality of life we have come to enjoy and the ability to sit in this House and have these debates. It is because of them and their willingness to go to other parts of the world and give us this incredible opportunity that we are here today and have the amazing quality of life that we do.

I should say that I will be splitting my time today with the member for Winnipeg North.

I would like to talk about where we were with our veterans over 10 years under the Conservatives, what they were able to do to the Veterans Affairs system writ large and how we saw diminishing services and support for veterans throughout the years.

The reality is that over 10 years, the Conservatives looked at the Veterans Affairs department as a place to cut costs in an effort to balance budgets, which they failed to do in almost every single year. Some examples of that are killing the lifetime pension for veterans and closing nine Veterans Affairs offices throughout the country. In fact, the Auditor General found that the previous Conservative government failed veterans, noting that the percentage of returned soldiers with mental health issues had actually increased sixfold between 2002 and 2014.

The Conservatives slashed 900 jobs, despite pleas from managers in various departments in Veterans Affairs not to do that because of the impacts it would have on delivering services to veterans. The Conservatives clawed back nearly $1 billion from Veterans Affairs, generally speaking. In fact the courts ordered the Conservative government to pay $887 million to veterans. The court had to order the previous Conservative government to pay veterans.

● (1515)

We come to where we are today and what we are trying to do. Of course, when we look at the record of the previous 10 years, the failure of a decade, we could call it, under the Conservative government as it related to veterans, it is not something that we are just going to flip a switch on and be able to bring back all the services immediately, especially when we talk about the money that was stripped from the department and the employees who were fired or terminated from the department. Not only has this government worked to re-establish the services that existed 10 years ago, it has surpassed those services in many regards.

The service our veterans have provided to our nation, as I said earlier, is invaluable, and this government understands that. There have been no costs spared in rewarding their service and providing our veterans with the quality of life they deserve. Let us talk about some of those things.

On the accomplishments in the budget of 2016, this government invested $5.7 billion to provide veterans with better financial security by increasing income replacement from 75% to 90% of a veteran's pre-release salary and increasing the annual maximum pain and suffering compensation.

We re-opened offices that were closed in Corner Brook, Newfoundland; Brandon, Manitoba; Sydney, Nova Scotia; Kelowna, B.C.; Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; Charlottetown, P.E.I.; Thunder Bay, Ontario; Windsor, Ontario; and Prince George, B.C. Not only did we re-open all nine offices, we opened another in Surrey, B.C., which expanded outreach into the north. Veterans Affairs staff are now able to travel to the territories and northern communities monthly to meet with veterans and their families.

A little closer to home, in eastern Ontario, of the nine offices that were re-opened, two are in Ontario: Thunder Bay and Windsor. We have seen that the re-opened office in Thunder Bay has brought up to seven additional front-line staff to the province to improve access for veterans. The Thunder Bay office serves approximately 1,700 veterans and enables approximately 70 veterans who work with case managers to meet with them in person.

With respect to the 900 staff who were terminated from Veterans Affairs, 460 new staff have been brought on. This government has a commitment to make sure that we can move from the 40:1 ratio of veterans to caseworkers to 25:1. A ratio of 40:1 is where the previous government left us, which is 40 veterans for every caseworker. We have made significant progress. I believe we are at around 30 veterans per caseworker now and are moving towards that 25:1 ratio.

On pensions for life, we committed to bring back pensions for life to make things simpler and to make services simpler, and that is exactly what has been done. Veterans whose service and sacrifice result in illness or injury now get a monthly tax-free pension for life of up to $1,150. Veterans who were greatly injured, which has had an impact on their quality of life, can receive an additional $1,500 a month tax-free for life. Veterans whose injuries prevent them from finding gainful work will now get the income replacement benefit, providing 90% of a veteran's pre-release salary monthly, indexed annually. In addition to that, we have provided various other services for our veterans.

What I am trying to say is that despite the political gaming with this particular issue, and it is an extremely unfortunate one, this government has been absolutely committed to veterans. It has not only been restoring what the previous Conservative government removed from veterans but has been going above and beyond that. I am extremely proud of this government's reputation on the veterans file, and I look forward to continuing to work on this.

As I said earlier, there will never be enough we can do for veterans, but we must always strive to do more and better for those who gave us the incredible quality of life we have.

● (1520)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the debate has certainly been concerning and very puzzling. It really revolves around the government's response from the very beginning.

Sometimes things happen that are very unusual and clearly wrong. I want to go back to when people heard that Clifford Olson was receiving OAS. The immediate response of the then prime minister was, "I have instructed the minister to look at what options are available to us to rectify the situation because it should be rectified."

Now, it took a little while to make sure that it was rectified in a way that did not have unintended consequences, but it was recognized from the outset that this was wrong and that it needed to be rectified.

What is it with the Liberals and the government that they could continue to try to defend and hide behind all sorts of ridiculous arguments on this particular case? It is wrong. It should be rectified. Why have they not been willing to go there for so many weeks?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, the reality of the situation is that it was the veterans charter in 2006, which the Conservative government brought in, that extended benefits to the families of veterans. It had not been changed since 2011. However, it was the extension of those benefits that actually enabled what happened and what the Conservatives are talking about in this motion.

In my opinion, this House is about policy setting, and we should create good policy. If one wants to have a discussion about what should be in that charter to trigger certain aspects of it to remove someone's ability to access benefits, then we should have that discussion. We should have that policy debate. The reality of the matter is that it was the Conservatives who brought in this piece of legislation that enabled what we are debating today.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly not going to defend the Conservatives' record on Veterans Affairs, but it is a bit egregious for the Liberals to try to pretend that they are any better. If we look at the ratio of caseworkers to veterans right now, in Kingston, Thunder Bay and Calgary it is 1:42. That has not changed. The member is criticizing the Conservatives for having a ratio of 1:40, and we are seeing cities across this country where the ratio is actually higher.

The other problem is that the Conservatives shortchanged veterans by putting aside about $150 million that should have been invested in Veterans Affairs, yet $143 million was left on the table the year before last. This year it is $148 million. What we are seeing is the Liberals copying the shortchanging of veterans that started under the Conservatives.

Will the member admit that the Liberal government has not done what it should be doing to help our nation's veterans?

● (1525)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, no, I will not admit to that. The member can cherry-pick his numbers and cherry-pick two or three different cities, but the reality is that if we look at the averages, the average under the Conservatives was 40:1. Our goal is 25:1, and we are currently at 33:1. I know if we cherry-pick certain areas, we can have numbers that make the debate sound great in this place, but if we look at the averages, they are exactly what I presented.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want this member to maybe take a moment and be mindful that it was actually the Paul Martin Liberal government that introduced the new veterans charter. The minister of the day had to present it to this place and be accountable for it. The Conservative Party, under Mr. Harper, had successive ministers who tried to improve that piece of legislation. Again, the member can say whether we fell short, it is up to him, but he cannot misconstrue those facts.

The second thing is that this debate is about the Minister of Veterans Affairs not correcting a wrong, which is being seen right across this country. Does this member believe that the minister needs to stand and answer legitimate questions in regard to the misuse of funds going to a convicted cop killer who has never served a day in his life in our great military?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, I would suggest that this place is for policy. What we debate in here is policy and how we shape policy so it can properly impact those who are receiving benefits in this case. If one wants to have a discussion about what in the policy triggers someone not getting benefits, let us have that discussion. However, to use an opportunity in an extremely tragic situation like this as a political tool is extremely disappointing, and I think Canadians see right through it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, right from the start, may I say that my heart and thoughts go out to the Campbell family for everything they have had to endure.

There is a certain grieving element to this that is often overlooked. For anyone to try to give the false impression, or try to imply, that members on all sides of the House would in any way try to take away from the grieving of the Campbell family would be unjust and unfair. I just wanted to express my condolences to the late Constable Campbell's family and friends, that very important circle, who have gone through what they had to endure.

Having said that, we do have a government that is committed to our Canadian Armed Forces and, in particular, our veterans and their families. We have seen the turning of a page with the last federal election. For many years, I sat on opposition benches. I am a veteran myself, having served for over three years in Alberta in the Canadian Armed Forces as an air traffic controller assistant. I had the opportunity to walk in many different parades with World War II veterans.

I understand and appreciate their many different illnesses, and the huge sense of pride in the service they provided to Canada, both during times of war and peace. Their service is ongoing, even upon their retirement. Their pensions and benefits are all very important things that we provide to veterans, because it is the right thing to do. That also includes the families.

As I have pointed out, for years I sat on the opposition benches and saw government actions that spoke much louder than the words we have heard today inside the chamber. Let me just cite a couple of examples that had a profoundly negative impact on our veterans.

One of the issues that was quite common at the time was the number of individuals working for Veterans Affairs who were losing their jobs. We are talking about hundreds of individuals who were let go under Stephen Harper at a significant cost, in terms of quality of service to our veterans. That needs to be recognized.

The other issue that was raised day after day was the issue of office closures in different regions of Canada. We had Veterans Affairs offices that were being closed. Veterans were being told to pick up the phone and call a number, as opposed to being able to have a face-to-face interaction. In my own community of Manitoba, the Brandon office was one of those offices that were closed.

Contrast that to what we have seen since the last federal election. We opened a new centre of excellence for post-traumatic stress disorder. We launched a joint suicide prevention strategy along with the Canadian Armed Forces. We reopened those nine offices that I referred to as having been closed across the country. We provided better front-line services through 10 regional offices. We operate 19 operational stress injury clinics, which include eight satellite clinics, to offer services closer to where veterans live. As I indicated, additionally, we hired over 450 individuals to help provide services for veterans. We instituted the pension for life program that will have a very strong and powerful impact for veterans.

● (1530)

These are some of the actions the government has taken over the last two and half to three years.

Moreover, in our budgets, we have seen dramatic increases to the tune of hundreds of millions of additional dollars being put into Veterans Affairs to support our vets in a very real and tangible way, via literally thousands of contacts with individuals who are dealing with mental health type of issues. We have seen tax breaks given to mental health services. Here, one of the things that comes to my mind is the service dogs, because we have seen the positive impact of those dogs, which can be a fairly costly, on our vets. There have been many actions taken by this government over the last two to three years, and I would contrast that any day with the previous 10 years of Stephen Harper.

Today a motion has been brought forward by the official opposition that I believe would have been better discussed and debated in question period, which the Conservatives have attempted to do, to provide commentary on the degree of effectiveness and cooperation there has been in looking at the issue. There is a difference between the Conservatives and the New Democrats when it comes to the issue of privacy for veterans.

The current minister stood in this place and explained with passion very clearly how important it is that we respect the privacy rights of our vets. Today in question period and earlier when he addressed this motion, he has consistently stood up for veterans to provide the assurance that this government will respect privacy.

The minister raises it for a good reason, because we saw how the Conservative government dealt with an issue of privacy and did a great disservice to Canadians. I want to refer to the individual in that regard, because it highlights the difference between the Conservatives and the Liberals when it comes to veterans and maintaining privacy.

Many of us might recall Sean Bruyea. He had concerns with regard to the Conservative government in 2010. He raised a number of issues and the minister at the time asked for some reports. Part of those reports were the medical records of Mr. Bruyea. Those records ultimately were leaked in one form or another to the media, where there were some reports done. I believe it was an attempt to ultimately discredit that veteran. I would argue that the government of the day did not do what it was supposed to do, which was to stand by our vets and protect their privacy.

At the end of the day, the Harper government ended up apologizing for violating the privacy of that veteran. Fast forward to today where the minister clearly indicated that what we are really talking about is the privacy of a veteran. The message he is sending to veterans in all regions of our country is that we have a government that will stand by our vets and respect their privacy, that there will not be a leak from this government.

If we compare what we have done for our veterans in two to three years with the 10-plus years of the Conservatives, veterans will understand and appreciate that this government has been there for them in a very real and tangible way and that this is a government that will stand up for the privacy of our veterans and their records.

● (1535)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg North just threw some stuff in there that has to be addressed.

He did not address the lack of leadership by the minister. When the Minister of Veterans Affairs was in here getting bombarded by questions and refused to take responsibility for why Chris Garnier was receiving veterans benefits, Veterans Affairs Canada actually rescinded the policy, yet the minister refused to back down. That is a lack of leadership.

The member for Winnipeg North talks about the PTSD service dogs. Veterans Affairs cancelled the program on September 18. It said it was no longer in place because not enough research had been done on the file. All the research shows that there has been a significant reduction in PTSD among veterans using service dogs.

He talks about all the money the Liberals are spending. Guess what? They have allowed $372 million in veterans funding to lapse.

The list goes on. He talked about veteran Sean Bruyea. He failed to mention that Sean Bruyea is suing the Minister of Veterans Affairs for defamation of character.

The member gets up here and yells and screams all the time. However, the fact is, as a veteran, all he wears is a partisan hat when he is in the House, and that has to end.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, if the member were to review his comments and contrast them with the budget, the budget document states that there was an expansion of the medical tax break for these specialty dogs. That directly contradicts what the member just said.

He just said that the minister has not been doing his job on this issue. He is implying that. The minister's responsibility is to the veterans of Canada and protecting their rights and privacy.

The member might not like the manner in which I present myself at times, because I am quite passionate on a wide spectrum of different issues. However, having served in the Canadian Forces, even with some of these issues, I am very proud to have been a member of the forces.

● (1540)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we just learned that the Liberal government has now decided to take a sledgehammer approach to this situation. It has not only revoked services for Mr. Garnier, which we support, as it is an outrageous case, but it has also now taken away all services from the families of incarcerated veterans. This does not take into account that there may be family members who are incarcerated because they had fallen afoul of the law as a direct result of mental illness or PTSD related to their experience as a veteran and who might have come home with some real and difficult challenges. The Liberals have taken a sledgehammer approach to this without analysis, without testimony at committee and without examining it properly.

We in the NDP brought forward questions through a letter. We took that approach because we know this is a sensitive issue and we did not want to see veterans lose their services and those of their families, which they fought so hard for. This is how the government has responded. It has mishandled this situation terribly from the get-go. The minister should have intervened early on, cited this as a unique case and fixed it. Instead, the government has just made a terrible mess.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, on the one hand we have the Conservatives who are saying one thing, and on the other hand we now have the NDP saying something completely different.

The minister initially and consistently since then has indicated that he is working with his departmental officials to get a better understanding of the circumstances, while at the same time respecting the privacy of a veteran. I would argue that is the responsible and right thing to do. The minister is in fact on top of this particular file, and ultimately the government will move forward in respecting our veterans. Every budget and piece of legislation of ours has demonstrated that this government values and respects our veterans and their family members.

The Deputy Speaker: The time has expired for questions and comments. I note there are members trying to participate in this particular part of the debate. We will make every effort to make sure that happens in the next round.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time speaking to this important issue with my colleague from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

I rise today to speak to our Conservative opposition motion regarding the outrageous and unjust payment of veterans benefits to cover post-traumatic stress disorder treatment for a convicted second-degree murderer.

My heart is with the family of officer Campbell. The murder of a loved one is something a family can never get over. Although justice has been served in the sentence of the loved one's killer, knowing this criminal has received benefits that are intended for veterans must be painful.

It is painful for me to talk about this issue as well. It is not something that I gladly rise to speak about today, but it is serious and it needs to be addressed. The Liberal government has failed to address this issue adequately.

It has been known for several weeks now that a convicted killer who has never served in the Canadian forces is receiving benefits intended for veterans. A veteran is involved, and we certainly want to respect the privacy of this individual and the family, but we cannot use that right to privacy to bypass the fundamental principle that veterans benefits are for veterans and their families, not for a convicted killer who has never served a day in his life.

There has been some movement on this issue over the last couple of hours, but a lot of my speech still applies.

I am proud to represent many communities that have significant numbers of military personnel and their families. Many of these soldiers choose to retire in my area after their years of service.They are looking for a quiet place to settle down, on a country acreage or in a small town. I have had the privilege of meeting with many of these veterans to discuss issues like their benefits. I am happy to call many of them my friends and my dearest supporters.

Today I am going to speak about two veterans I have had the opportunity to get to know over the past year. They have had a really big impact on me.

Many members in the House know of Major Mark Campbell, an infantry officer who lost both of his legs to an IED in Afghanistan. He and his comrades took the federal government to court again and again, finally appealing to the Supreme Court, which refused to hear their case. It was then that they realized that the party that had promised to never take a veteran to court to fight over benefits had broken its promise.

I bring up this example because in the past few weeks we have seen a government, a Prime Minister and his Minister of Veterans Affairs absolutely stonewall this Parliament, even in some cases refusing to answer questions and denigrating the opposition for having the audacity to hold them accountable.

They claim they are standing up for a veteran and that we should not be speaking out on this outrageous decision from Veterans Affairs for a killer who is receiving benefits and yet has never served.

Why is the Liberal government fighting against our veterans so fiercely in our courts and yet in the House defending so vigorously someone who has never served?

I often say in my riding that I am running because I want to put victims and their families first, not criminals, but too often it seems that the Liberals put criminals first, not victims and their families.

Many members in the House will also remember that back in February, when the Prime Minister came to Edmonton, he took questions from a constituent of mine, former corporal and Afghanistan veteran Brock Blaszczyk. Brock told the Prime Minister that he was ready to be killed in action, but he was not ready for his government to turn its back on him. Some of that is on us as Conservatives, but a lot of it is also on the Liberal government. The Prime Minister's response was to tell Brock that veterans "are asking for more than we can give right now".

Today we see that resources that should be going to our veterans are being diverted inappropriately to someone who has never served, someone who, even if he had served, would not be eligible for these benefits because he would have been dishonourably discharged for his crime.

Why does the Prime Minister tell our veterans they "are asking for more than we can give", while holding out his hand to provide for those who are not entitled to these benefits?

When this issue came up, I decided to text Brock to ask him what he thought. He messaged me back later, saying, "This is another slap in the face to veterans. The government says that every claim is treated on a case-by-case basis, but what could the case have been for a 30-year-old cop killer who never served?"

● (1545)

Brock has been continually denied his full benefits from Veterans Affairs, despite having lost a leg, suffering 55% soft tissue loss, 80% nerve damage in his other leg, and 30% nerve damage in his arm, and being diagnosed with PTSD from his time serving his country in Afghanistan.

Last week, the Prime Minister rose in the House to state that when members serve, their families serve with them. This is something I absolutely agree with. It is absolutely true. However, no member of the Canadian Forces who murdered a police officer, or anyone for that matter, who hid the body of their victim and who then was even caught in the process of trying to make it impossible to find the body, would be eligible for those benefits. No one who served would be given those benefits. Why should someone who has never served be treated better?

This brings me to my final example. This extraordinary woman is not a veteran herself, and her husband did not serve in the Canadian Forces. Nonetheless, he gave his life in service as a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. This man is the late Constable David Wynn from St. Albert, Alberta, which is just next to my riding in Sturgeon River—Parkland. His wife's name is Shelly MacInnis-Wynn. Shelly and I have known each other for a couple of years now, and despite the crime that was committed against her and her family, she has never backed down from saying what needs to be said.

The Prime Minister says that when members serve, their families serve with them. If the Prime Minister is true to his word, why does Shelly have to fight this government for funding to cover the cost of her PTSD treatments from the brutal murder of her husband that fateful day? Has she not given enough? Why does she have to fight, while this killer gets his benefits up front? Should a victim not be given priority?

Why is it that the Liberals will fight so hard to ensure that all criminals get their payout and receive their benefits, yet they throw the book at and stymie the needs of victims' families with endless bureaucracy? It is perverse. It defies logic and common sense.

Speaking for my constituents, I call on the Liberals to do the right thing, to not hide behind sympathy or some legal bafflegab but instead take action. Today, we have seen some action, but we need to get more clarity on that action. I call on them to rescind his benefits, which are benefits for veterans, not for criminals. Give him what he is due as a criminal in our justice system, but do not give him what he has not earned through service to our nation.

Immediately after this, I hope the government will work immediately to ensure that no victim and no victim's family has to fight the bureaucracy for the benefits they deserve. I call on the Liberals to stand up for victims, stand up for their families, do the right thing, rescind these benefits and get the job done.

● (1550)

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have many veterans in my riding. Actually, today is the birthday of one of them. I want to wish a happy birthday to Max. This summer, Max went to a camp called Camp My Way, where he had a great experience dealing with the issues he has around his post-traumatic stress disorder.

The reality for Max is that he had to fundraise to get there. He is currently working with my office because of the deeply powerful impact that Camp My Way had on his life.

All of us in the House understand that this is a devastating thing we are discussing here today, but we have to look at the reality that Veterans Affairs has lapsed spending of over $300 million. Could the member share with the House a bit about what that really means for supporting our veterans in this country?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Speaker, I also want to wish happy birthday to the hon. member's constituent, Max. As someone who has also served in the Canadian Forces, when we see someone who has put themselves out there to serve our country, we want to ensure they get the best possible treatment they can get.

One of the things we need to recognize is that all treatment needs to be veteran led, in the sense that most of the time, the veteran is the best person to know what would work best for him or her. We have seen that with the service dog and equine programs, and I certainly see a lot of potential with the camp my colleague mentioned. We need to refocus and reorient so it is veteran-led treatment.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to focus on the last sentence of the member's presentation, where he said, "Stand up for veterans."

I am curious how he can say something like that, when over 10 years all the Conservative government did was strip away benefits and services from veterans. The Conservatives killed the lifetime pensions for veterans, closed nine offices, fired 900 employees from Veterans Affairs and had to have the courts order them to pay veterans the money they were owed. In fact, at the time, Judge Robert Barnes said that the clawbacks created by the Conservative government had a "particularly harsh effect on the most seriously disabled CF members", and that he rejected the measures "unreservedly".

How can the member say we need to stand up for veterans in Canada, when the record of the Conservative government over 10 years was so abysmal?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Speaker, it takes a lot to admit when one is wrong. Conservatives did some great things for our veterans, especially in our final years, fixing a lot of the problems that had to be fixed.

However, for the government to completely abdicate any responsibility for its actions in this case is just arrogant. The Liberals should recognize their own faults. Humility is the beginning of wisdom. If the government starts showing some humility, maybe it will get something done for our veterans.

● (1555)

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am a little concerned about the reality of selective memory in this place.

As members know, we have a covenant with our veterans, in terms of their unlimited liability. I would like to remind the House that the Conservatives took Equitas to court for fighting for that unlimited liability. As has been mentioned, the Liberals continued that court case. They even used the same lawyers as the Conservatives. However, the Conservatives started it.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Speaker, I am certain the member's question comes from a well-intentioned place. However, she may be a little confused about the concept of unlimited liability, which I certainly know very well from my position in the forces. Soldiers are willing to give everything for their country when they put on that uniform. That is something that is absolutely sacred.

When a government comes along, it needs to fulfill its obligations to our veterans. All governments certainly try their best, but there has been a lot of falling short. We need to recognize that and rectify those things.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member of Parliament for the great riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke in the upper Ottawa Valley, home to Garrison Petawawa, training ground of the warrior, I am pleased to add my voice to the groundswell of Canadians demanding veterans benefits for veterans and their deserving family members. It is absolutely unbelievable that the current Liberal government cries poverty when it comes to paying out funds that have already been set aside for veterans, but can find $10.5 million to hand out to a confessed soldier murderer. The federal government has no problem paying out funds earmarked for veterans to a convicted cop killer, but denies veterans benefits.

A veteran in Edmonton said, "I was prepared to be killed in action. What I wasn't prepared for, Mr. Prime Minister, is Canada turning its back on me." The Prime Minister's party response was that veterans are asking for more than he can give them right now. It was appalling. Actually, what veterans are asking for is what the Prime Minister promised them in terms of pain, suffering and incapacity payment. Most if not all veterans who might qualify for such benefits under the Liberal April 2019 election bribe plan will receive less than under the programs that were available from the former Conservative government.

It is sad to see the members for Kanata—Carleton and Orléans, as former Canadian Forces members, supporting their party's decision to refuse to fund worthwhile programs like service dogs for veterans. Study after study has shown service dogs help veterans with PTSD and so much more. Despite all the evidence, which I know from working with veterans and sharing their success stories about service dogs, this cold, callous Prime Minister is out of touch when he claims veterans are asking for too much.

The benefits are real. I led the initiative to have service dogs matched with veterans in Canada. I saw the benefits first-hand when a friend and former soldier's service dog not only assisted him as a seeing-eye dog for his blindness, but sensed and stopped PTSD reactions to sights, smells and sounds. This is a treatment that is drug-free. Despite all the evidence, the Liberal Party still refuses to fund service dogs. That means veterans who need service dogs are forced to rely on the charity of others, since the combined training of the dog and master can cost upward of $40,000. The federal government policy on veterans is that there are veterans funds for terrorists and cop killers and there is no money for veterans. It is shameful. Many may never get their service dogs; others have to wait years. Veterans who put their lives on the line for Canada should not have to wait. It is just not right.

My riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke is home to the Joan D. Bray Veteran Learning Centre at Willis College in Arnprior. The centre, through the financial generosity of college president, Rima Aristocrat, pioneered the veteran-friendly transition program. The program, developed by Willis College Arnprior campus manager Bernard Doyle, with the help of veterans, is a place where changing technology is helping veterans. Its graduates fill key positions in cybersecurity. This is an example of the private sector responding to the needs of veterans. This is not the approach the federal government takes to veterans' needs. What a cruel trick to play on veterans to announce a plan or some other program that few if any qualify for, and to spend veterans funds on empty storefronts in government ridings and hope enough time will pass that veterans will forget what they were originally promised.

Budget 2016 marked the beginning of a second Liberal era of darkness for Canada's women and men in the Canadian Armed Forces. In my riding, which includes Garrison Petawawa, Canada's largest army base, we remember the decade of darkness that came after the political decision to scapegoat and disband the Canadian Airborne Regiment and the deep cuts in defence spending that followed that politically motivated decision. The decision to relocate or re-profile, which is Liberal-speak for cut, $8.5 billion in defence allocations in budget 2017 in addition to previous cuts, confirms the worst fears of our women and men in uniform.

● (1600)

Canada's veterans are being told that they should just wait and that tomorrow and the next budget will fix everything. It is the "tomorrow" budget, but tomorrow never comes. It is a false economy to plan on denying veterans benefits with the expectation the veterans will eventually give up fighting for what they are entitled to, or die off from their injuries.

Last year in this House, I posed a question to the Prime Minister on behalf of Warrant Officer Roger Perreault, a veteran in the Canadian Armed Forces, regarding the decision to reward terrorists who maim and kill Canadian soldiers, while denying compensation to soldiers injured in roadside bomb attacks.

Retired Warrant Officer Roger Perreault is an Afghan veteran who served his country honourably. His great-grandfather was an engineer in the First World War. Roger carried his great-grandfather's cap badge for good luck to Afghanistan. In addition to serving in Afghanistan, he served twice in Bosnia and three special duty areas over a span of 27 years. He was medically released from the military in 2017.

Retired Warrant Officer Roger Perreault was injured in 2006 in a blast from an improvised explosive device while serving in Afghanistan. He has had three back surgeries, two hip replacements and other complications. His release was timed to take place two days before the government's fake news announcement that all support programs would be in place for veterans before an injured soldier was discharged from the military. Nothing was in place for Roger and his family.

Now released from the military, retired Warrant Officer Perreault is being denied the critical injury benefit by veterans affairs, being told that, at age 47, his injuries are the result of his body wearing out, ignoring the injuries of the IED blast. Today, veteran Warrant Officer Roger Perreault informs me that the Veterans Review and Appeal Board has denied his appeal of the original decision, which denied him the critical injury benefit he obviously deserves.

What is most appalling about the latest denial is the cavalier dismissal of the attending medical professional's assessment. Attacking the credibility of a doctor who treated Warrant Officer Perreault shows how low the government will stoop to deny a veteran benefits. Attacking a medical professional who treated Roger demonstrates the extremes the government will go to just to deny a veteran help.

The Prime Minister should be ashamed that a Canadian veteran, who sacrificed his health and well-being of his family, is treated in such a shoddy fashion. Retired Warrant Officer Roger Perreault's wife, Fran, remembers his departure every day very clearly because her family would never be the same again. She said:

> On Aug. 1, I put one man on that bus. Nov. 3, a different man came home. He looked like my husband. He talked like my husband. But it wasn't my husband. Part of him is still over there somewhere and I don't know if I'll ever get it back.

On the evening of October 7, 2006, while on mission in Afghanistan, Warrant Officer Roger Perreault was on a routine patrol in a LAV III. He had stopped behind another LAV III, and dismounted when a large explosion ripped the left side of the LAV, throwing him to the ground. While at the time Roger considered himself lucky to have survived the explosion, several of his close comrades in arms were not so lucky. Trooper Mark Andrew Wilson of the Royal Canadian Dragoons died that day.

On September 3, 2006, Sergeant Shane Hank Stachnik, from Roger's 2 Combat Engineer Regiment, Warrant Officer Richard Francis Nolan and Warrant Officer Frank Robert Mellish of the Royal Canadian Regiment died during a Taliban assault. Roger is haunted by memories of those fallen comrades.

Now, considering the treatment he is receiving from his own government, he is not so sure who was the lucky one. Additional existing and future benefits have highly restrictive criteria. The Liberals have made it so difficult to qualify for the critical injury benefit that, by their own estimates, only six veterans per year will qualify going forward.

● (1605)

Worst of all, a critical injury benefit that would make a real difference in the life of this injured veteran and his family is a pittance in comparison to the $10.5 million paid out to a confessed terrorist who built IEDs as part of his mission to kill Canadian soldiers.

Warrant Officer Perreault and other Afghanistan veterans are the real Canadian heroes. Let us start treating them like heroes.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her passion with regard to veterans. I know she has a military base in her riding and is passionate about the subject, but she talks about instances going back to 2006. Sometimes we want to forget about the previous government especially since veterans offices were shuttered and programs were cut.

Does she want to comment on the additional $10 billion that has been spent by this government for veterans and the priority that this government has taken after 10 years of Stephen Harper and what his government did?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I will do even better. I will conclude my remarks in answer to his question by quoting from the Liberal Party candidate I defeated in the last federal election and what he now has to say on social media about the Prime Minister.

He said, "Three years ago, I decided to seek the Liberal nomination for the candidacy in Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. My only political goal was to play a role in assuring that no other brave Canadian soldier would be penalized at home due to their service. I was inspired by the Prime Minister's promises to fix things. I was inspired by the presence of other veterans lining up to win nominations for the Liberals. I legitimately felt hopeful for the first time in a long time. I believed them. Now I realize that I was wrong. The Prime Minister recently stated that Canadian veterans want more than Canada can give. I stood on a stage behind the Prime Minister in August of 2015 when he made a promise to veterans, a promise which was obviously, in retrospect, a political bargaining chip. I have first-hand experience as a service member, stakeholder, and party member with respect to the way our military is regarded and treated. At some of the highest levels I have personally witnessed the way in which our injured and ill are regarded with skepticism, suspicion, and cynicism by members of the governing party. It needs to end now."

Veterans benefits for veterans.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we first started this process, when we learned about the Garnier case, veterans and Canadians were outraged. They wanted this fixed. We talked to veterans organizations, but they are also concerned about the ramifications of fixing this. They did not want it to affect veterans and their families' benefits, benefits that they fought so hard for.

We just learned this afternoon that the Liberals have decided to take the sledgehammer approach to this. They have decided to cut all benefits for all family members of veterans who are incarcerated regardless of the crime, for example, if someone had small amounts of marijuana or whether the crime, or PTSD or a mental health illness was a direct result of the member's service. The Liberals decided to take away all of their benefits.

I wish that the Liberals had taken an approach that was more inclusive and examined the situation. Clearly they had to deal with the Garnier situation, but to just take a blanket approach to this situation and take all benefits from family members who might be affected by a veteran's service is concerning to me.

I wonder if the member supports the Liberal decision to take away benefits from all veterans' family members who are incarcerated.

● (1610)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I have to put some thought into that, but it sounds like what the Liberals always do. Instead of correcting their missteps and their wrongdoing, they punish others for it. This is the way that they have treated veterans in the past and this is what they continue to do going forward.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, that was a cryptic answer to the previous question, so I will ask it again. Under what circumstances, under what level of crime or what level of incarceration should individuals have their benefits taken away? If the minister went too far, could the hon. member please describe the Conservatives' policy plan and what they see going forward?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I would love to explain what our policy plan is, but he will see it soon enough. As soon as the 2019 election is over, we will bring forth all of our policy initiatives, including one that will benefit veterans instead of taking away from them.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

I am thankful for the chance to once again speak about veterans and our Canadian Armed Forces personnel. It was an honour to serve as NDP critic for Veterans Affairs, and I am truly grateful for the dedication to veterans by the current critic, the member for Courtenay—Alberni.

In my several years as critic and deputy critic, I learned that veterans were motivated by a deep love for Canada, loyalty to the service they considered a profound privilege, their families and a deep sense of justice. Veterans understand justice. It is part of their DNA. They want it for the civilian population they serve in war and in peace. They want it for those trampled by violence, aggression and dictatorial governments. They want it for themselves and their families.

In all the years I have been in this place, there has been a constant and recurring theme regarding how our veterans have been left behind and forgotten by the current and previous governments.

The covenant between the Canadian government and its veterans is considered an unlimited liability rather than providing comfort and care for the sacrifice of life in protecting our country. Veterans have been forced to take the current and previous governments to court to defend and maintain lifetime pensions. This is the result of Veterans Affairs Canada's failure to provide prompt service and benefits. When a dispute arises, Veterans Affairs systematically leaves veterans to the morass of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board.

In my own tenure as critic, I became aware of the heart-wrenching case of one young man whose mother contacted my office. Her son suffers from PTSD as a result of his service in the Canadian Armed Forces and over the past several months he has presented as a suicide risk. His medical release has been held up for months by VAC, despite his desperate situation. The young man in question has just under 10 years of service. He feels that VAC is delaying help to get rid of him. Less than 10 years of service significantly affects his pension. I cannot help but be reminded of the service personnel being pushed out just before they were entitled to a pension.

The case is further complicated by the impacts this young man experienced as a result of the cocktail of drugs he was prescribed. The drugs caused him to experience sleeplessness, stress, disorientation, lethargy and depression. Because he is still in the military, the health plan does not cover the cost of his medical marijuana prescription. He has undergone 29 medication changes since his initial diagnosis and reports that each of the high-powered drugs has been worse than the last. The medical marijuana has helped him immensely. He reports that he has finally slept fully for the first time in three years.

However, there is, as I previously mentioned, a catch because the military health plan does not cover the cost of medical marijuana. VAC will cover the cost once he is medically released, so he is not being released.

His reassessment went back to VAC on May 3, and still remains at level one. This young man is in panic mode. He and many others on the base believe VAC is delaying claims so it does not have to make payouts up front. However, this individual is fortunate. He has family advocating for him. Not every abandoned serviceman or woman has such advocacy. He is lucky to have a forceful mother.

Veterans Affairs Canada has not provided this young man the help he needs, either in the past when my office contacted it or now months later. This is the same mother who confronted the Minister of Veterans Affairs at the legion convention in Winnipeg last August to plead for her son. The minister announced then that he had empowered his front-line workers to get the job done. The job is not getting done by the government. Veterans, CF personnel and their families continue to suffer. We demand better.

It is important to view this through the lens of the Prime Minister's mandate letter to the Minister of Veterans Affairs. It states:

> Veterans and their families have earned our respect and gratitude. Veterans should not have to fight their own government for the support and compensation they have earned. As Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, your overarching goal will be to ensure that our government lives up to our sacred obligation to Veterans and their families. I expect you to ensure that Veterans receive the respect, support, care, and economic opportunities they deserve. You will ensure that we honour the service of our Veterans and provide new career opportunities, make it easier for Veterans to access services—including mental health services—and do more to support the families of Canada's Veterans.

● (1615)

That is a lovely letter and it expresses a lovely sentiment. However, pretty words and flowery promises mean nothing when they are not supported by action, real and substantive change that results in better access to services for our miliary personnel and veterans who have given themselves in service and have every right to expect the government to live up to its side of the covenant.

Therefore, let us look at the Liberal promises to veterans and the reality that exist, despite those promises.

The Liberals promised an education in training benefits of up to $80,000 in funding to further education, to begin a new track or to be used for career or personal development courses in order to give veterans purpose and help them feel satisfied with their main post-military job or activity. In reality, the program is so insufficiently staffed and wretchedly underfunded that it cannot provide any substantive or lasting benefits to veterans trying to access it.

The government promised to reopen Veterans Affairs service offices that had been closed by the previous Conservative government. It was reported by Global News, on September 20:

> After nearly three years in power, the Liberals have not followed through with a pledge to ensure there is an adequate number of caseworkers to help veterans make the transition to civilian life

The Prime Minister promised the government would provide one case worker for every 25 veterans. However, the ratio remains too high at 33:1. In some regions of the country it is 1:42, in cities like Kingston, Thunder Bay and Calgary. That is unacceptable.

With their term running out next year, the Liberals are only halfway to meeting their goals. They promised to reestablish lifelong pensions as an option for veterans. Instead, as eloquently outlined by veteran Sean Bruyea in his January piece for the CBC, "the government merely resurrected ghosts of Christmases past with a hodgepodge of benefits that amount to recycled, remodelled and repackaged programs that already exist." Upon the death of a veteran, the spouse receives nothing. If what had been delivered were a real pension, the spouse would receive a benefit.

The Liberals promised to eliminate the clawback of benefits for veterans who married after the age of 60, which is the infamous "gold diggers clause". That has not happened, The elderly spouses in the country, some of whom have loved and cared for a veteran for 20 or 25 years, are terrified of the poverty they will face because the Liberals failed them too.

The government promised to deliver a high standard of service and care for veterans requiring medical assistance. I wish I could tell my colleagues that the situation I described earlier of a mother contacting my office in desperate need of help for her son is not an isolated one. However, it is not.

While the Liberals recycle their promises, the blunt truth is that they have left $372 million unspent, which was money earmarked for veterans and their families. As a result, we see veterans and their families suffering, without access to medical care and resources, in fear that their family might be the next to lose a loved one to suicide as a result of negligence on the part of the government.

Therefore, we have the Conservative motion before the House about a truly tragic and heartbreaking murder and the unimaginable pain suffered by the victim's family. By all means, the perpetrator needs mental health care from Correction Service of Canada, not Veterans Affairs.

We must not forget, and veterans will never forget, the harm they and their families have suffered under the Liberal government as well as the previous Conservative government. Those same Conservative members who have brought forward this motion cut Veterans Affairs in their mandate. It was a cut of 5% right across the board. Apparently, like the Prime Minister, they too felt they did not have enough money to support veterans. They did have money for fake lakes, CEO tax breaks, enough to take veterans to court, enough to ship the former prime minister's limo to India, to the tune of a $1 million, and enough to leave $1.1 billion allocated for veterans unspent. However, there was no money for veterans services, no money for case workers and no money for the spouses and children left without real help.

● (1620)

Let us all remember the conduct and the failures of both these parties. Let us remember it, let us take them to task, and let us determine how best and honourably we can serve veterans.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would really like to thank my colleague from London—Fanshawe for all of her hard work to advocate for and speak for veterans in the House when they feel they have been mistreated by the previous Conservative government and the current Liberal government. I commend her on her work. She is deeply respected in the veterans community. Her voice is desperately needed in this conversation today.

The Liberals have failed veterans. They failed to meet their target to have an adequate number of case managers to even help veterans, as my colleague mentioned. Beyond the lack of front-line services, veterans have to wait longer to find out if they qualify for benefits, and this growing backlog is unacceptable.

The Liberals are going back on their election commitment and are failing to live up to the service standards, while not spending money approved by Parliament to help veterans. The money is there. However, it is not being spent by the Liberals. As the opposition, the Liberals blasted Stephen Harper for doing the exact same thing.

Could the member for London—Fanshawe comment on the hypocrisy of this?

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Speaker, I referenced earlier this very strange amnesia that takes over in this place, with one party forgetting what another party has done. It is indeed hypocritical.

My colleague mentioned the length of time it was taking to provide services for veterans. They are promised that within 16 weeks they are going to get services and help. Imagine if they were suicidal? Would they still be alive at the end of 16 weeks. Even worse, it is taking 29 and 32 weeks before veterans are getting help. Even at that, very often it is just not adequate.

Therefore, I am very concerned and disappointed that this Parliament, that the House and that those governments have not seen fit to look after our veterans.

● (1625)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree with some components of the member's speech. However, I would need more time to talk about some of the other issues that she has brought up.

With respect to the motion we are looking at today, it sounded like she was going to support our position. A convicted murderer getting access to veterans benefits when he has never served is unusual and does not sit well with the Canadian public.

Had the minister initially responded appropriately to this travesty, we would probably not be having this debate today. The fact that the Liberals continue to put forward all sorts of inappropriate arguments is the reason why we are here today.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Speaker, of course we do not know all of the details of this case. As legislators and members of the House, we have to be very careful that we take into account all of the information.

However, as I said earlier, by all means, we should be providing this mentally ill young man with health care. The tragedy is that government after government have cut services for mental health care and we are reaping the tragic results of that. However, we should be providing this young man with mental health care through Correctional Service of Canada, not Veterans Affairs.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is wrong. The government has provided literally hundreds of millions of dollars in additional funds. The Government of Canada has opened up the nine regional offices throughout Canada that were previously closed. We have brought in tax benefits and other benefits related to mental health. This government has been very progressive in ensuring that our veterans and their families get the services necessary, such as the pension for life. There is so much that this government has done.

Given that the NDP promised to balance the budget, how would it propose to do a fraction of what we have been able to do?

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Speaker, we would have done it by spending intelligently. We would have done it by making sure that every dollar went where it was needed, instead of leaving $372 million on the table that belonged to veterans and their families.

Yes, the Liberals opened offices, but they opened them without staff. On this nonsense about providing service, I would like him to explain to me how people can go 29 and 32 weeks without any response from Veterans Affairs. Is that at all looking after the veterans and families of our country?

I am sorry, but I am a shade upset by the conduct of this government and the previous government. A fake pension is not a pension, and they know it is a fake pension, and so do the veterans of this country.

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for North Island—Powell River, Canada Revenue Agency; the hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith, Status of Women; and the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni, The Environment.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by extending my condolences to the family of Catherine Campbell. I can only imagine the heartbreak that they have gone through.

As members know, we are supporting the motion.

I want to start by referring to question period earlier today when we had a very theatrical performance by the Minister of Veterans Affairs which I thought was entirely inappropriate, quite shameful in fact. I have been in this House for 15 years almost, and I have not seen a performance that was so inappropriate for any minister, as bad as the performance we saw this afternoon.

I wanted to cite that because after question period, we saw another indication of the complete disarray and chaos reigning within the Ministry of Veterans Affairs. What we saw, in complete contradiction to what the minister said in question period, was an announcement by Veterans Affairs that the department will no longer pay benefits for incarcerated relatives of veterans.

That is not what the motion calls for. The motion calls very specifically for Veterans Affairs Canada to pull the benefits that have been extended to Chris Garnier, and yet what the government and the Ministry of Veterans Affairs did was actually pull all of the benefits to all of the relatives of veterans who are either in a provincial or federal institution, whether it is as a result of the possession of marijuana which will soon be legalized or as a result of shoplifting, all of which are potentially impacted by PTSD as we know. The Ministry of Veterans Affairs reacted by pulling all of the benefits, but when questioned, Ministry of Veterans Affairs officials said that they could not confirm whether Mr. Garnier, who is the principal focus of the debate today, would actually have his benefits withdrawn.

We had the sad spectacle of the Minister of Veterans Affairs and then an announcement by the Ministry of Veterans Affairs, which seems to have impacted we do not know how many relatives of veterans, yet the government does not seem to be dealing with the fundamental issue that we are debating here in the House. I say that is sad because I believe our nation's veterans deserve much better than the kind of improvised service and talking points and the theatrical performance that we saw from the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

I come from a community that deeply appreciates our nation's veterans. On the cenotaph before the city hall in the city of New Westminster are the names of many of our nation's veterans who participated in a whole series of conflicts dating back to the Boer War, the First World War, the Second World War, and the Korean conflict. Two of my relatives' names, those of my grandfather and my uncle, are on that cenotaph before the city hall.

On Remembrance Day, New Westminster turns out in remarkably strong numbers, 3,000, 4,000, 5,000 strong. The city of New Westminster turns out to remember our nation's veterans on Remembrance Day. Whether it is pouring rain or there are high winds, it does not matter; the community turns out in the thousands to commemorate our nation's veterans.

Just up the hill from the city hall and the cenotaph that I spoke of is the headquarters of the Royal Westminster Regiment. That armoury is always filled with 1,000 or 1,500 people celebrating at a service prior to the Remembrance Day ceremony at the city hall. The 1,000, 1,200, or 1,500 people who are at the armoury then walk down in silence toward the cenotaph to commemorate with thousands of other citizens of New Westminster on Remembrance Day. A number of the veterans of the Royal Westminster Regiment have given their lives over the years, and New Westminster remembers.

● (1630)

The other community I represent is the city of Burnaby. On Remembrance Day there is always a service that is completely full which is held at the veterans hospital, the George Derby Centre. Members will remember just a few years ago under the former Conservative government that this hospital facility was cut of its funding and the hospital was passed over to the provincial government. What we have seen since then, as I go to George Derby frequently to honour our nation's veterans, is that the services for those veterans at the George Derby Centre in Burnaby have been severely cut over the years. We are seeing more and more frequently veterans calling for better services. The services that existed before had been slashed by the previous government and those cuts have continued under the current government.

There is a lot of rhetoric in the House of Commons and often we will see members of the government stand up and read talking points that are provided to them. They are supposed to put forward a strong argument about why the government has been doing everything it is supposed to do. However, I know from first-hand experience, and I think my colleagues in the NDP caucus can say the same thing, that it is very clear the benefits, programs and supports that should be going to our nation's veterans simply are not. It is simply that.

Peter Stoffer, the former NDP veterans critic, made a reputation nationally for speaking out for our nation's veterans. He always said that the government has an ongoing fiduciary responsibility towards all of our nation's veterans. However, whether it is the previous Conservative government or the current Liberal government, that is simply not the case.

This should not be a partisan issue. This should be something that we all unite on. There is no doubt if we ask 100 Canadians from coast to coast to coast that 100% of them would say that providing those benefits to our nation's veterans has to be a priority regardless of which government is in power. Yet as my colleague, the member for London—Fanshawe, just mentioned, hundreds of millions of dollars over the last few years, and over $1 billion over the last 10 years, has gone wanting at the same time as we are seeing our nation's veterans not being able to access programs, not being able to access housing, and often being left aside. That is simply unacceptable.

No Canadian would find it acceptable that there are veterans in our country who are homeless. No Canadian would find it acceptable that there are veterans who are trying to access addiction facilities and simply are not being provided with the supports that they need. No Canadians would find it acceptable that mental health services or employment services are not being provided to veterans or that they would have to wait months at a time before they could even access primary services.

Getting beyond the rhetoric, the question is simply this: Is the government doing nearly enough for our nation's veterans? The answer is no. The answer is that it is simply not. The answer is that there are veterans who will be sleeping outside tonight. That is unacceptable in a country as wealthy as Canada. Canadians support our nation's veterans and that any veteran would have to sleep outside is simply unacceptable. That veterans who struggle with mental health issues do not get the services they need is simply unacceptable. That veterans who struggle with addiction issues are not given access to long-term addiction programs that will actually provide them with the supports they need is simply unacceptable.

I have spoken about this in the House before. The Last Door in New Westminster provides long-term addiction services but has not been able to get access from Veterans Affairs so that veterans could be referred to its very effective program.

● (1635)

These are all signs of a ministry that is not doing its job, a minister that is not doing his job and a government that is not responding to the needs of our nation's veterans, regardless of the talking points. I understand that talking points are handed out to Liberal MPs, that they do not have a hand in drafting them, that they are supposed to read what is printed before them. Surely there is an MP in the Liberal caucus who is willing to stand up and say that the short-changing of our nation's veterans has to stop and that we have to go by the principle that all Canadian veterans are entitled to housing, mental health support and services, full stop. That is what should be happening.

● (1640)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we would all agree that we do not want to have knee-jerk policy changes that would have unintended consequences, but would my colleague not agree that it has taken almost a month from when this was first reported to when we are have finally gotten a response from the government, a completely inadequate one?

Would it not have been an appropriate response for the minister to have said initially that by all appearances this seemed to be wrong, that he would take action and have a report back on his desk within 24 hours, and that his department would look at a policy moving forward that would ensure this was taken care of? Would that not have been the appropriate response that anyone could reasonably expect from a minister, rather than waiting for many weeks and then getting mixed messages? Even the Prime Minister said he would not answer the question. It is quite shameful.

Mr. Peter Julian: I would have to agree with the member, Mr. Speaker. I have seldom seen it. She too has a long experience in the House of Commons. I have seldom seen a file that has been handled as badly as this one. The minister first said there would be a response, but we did not get one. He defended what happened and then stopped defending it.

As we heard just a few hours ago in the House, the minister said something quite the opposite to what was eventually announced. The substance of the issue of whether or not Mr. Garnier is still getting those veterans supports has still not been addressed.

We, and even government members, do not know how many veterans and their relatives will be impacted by a policy shift that goes in a different direction from what today's motion is calling for, and what members have been speaking to today. Potentially hundreds of veterans and their relatives will be impacted.

This has been badly handled, botched in a way that is so inappropriate when we think of the importance that all Canadians attach to our nation's veterans. They deserve better.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech and his passion for this file. I also want to again express my condolences to the Campbell family.

I agree with my colleague who said that veterans could be supported and that we must do more. That is the position we have taken.

Does the member recognize that we opened the Centre of Excellence on PTSD and Other Related Mental Health Conditions, re-opened nine trauma treatment offices closed by the Conservatives, and operated 19 clinics to serve our veterans? That is what we have done.

Does the member opposite agree with us?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I do not agree at all that they are doing enough for the veterans of this country. I do not agree at all that the new programs announced, which are in fact former programs, are adequate for Canada's veterans. I do not agree at all that cutting $372 million allocated for veterans is an appropriate way of running things.

The NDP criticized the Conservatives when they took away more than $1 billion from veterans. The Liberals are doing exactly the same thing to the tune of about $150 million a year. That is not appropriate. Instead of being partisan, they should be asking what is the right course of action for our veterans.

The Conservatives' actions were not appropriate, nor are those of the Liberals at this time. The Liberals have a responsibility to meet the needs of veterans, to return the $372 million that was taken away from them, and to provide veterans with the services and housing they need. In my opinion, that is the message Canadians want to give the Liberals.

● (1645)

[*English*]

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola.

I thank the official opposition critic for veterans affairs, the member for Brantford—Brant, for his motion today. It is disappointing that I even have to rise in this place today to speak to the despicable situation the government has put itself in. It was so disappointing when the Minister of Veterans Affairs found out that a convicted murderer, Chris Garnier, who is not a veteran, was receiving benefits from Veterans Affairs Canada for PTSD, which he has experienced because he killed police officer Catherine Campbell. It is benefit he should never be entitled because of his heinous crimes.

We have to remember that this individual, Christopher Garnier, picked up Catherine Campbell off duty, took her back to his apartment, broke her nose, strangled her, desecrated her body by treating it like garbage and dumped it underneath the Macdonald Bridge in Halifax.

Catherine Campbell was not just an outstanding police officer, but also a volunteer firefighter. I extend my condolences to her family. I hope that with this whole situation, they not have been revictimized by the actions of Veterans Affairs in extending benefits to the killer of their daughter, benefits he is not entitled to. That, to me, is very disgusting.

This whole debate today is disgusting. It is disgusting because of this vicious act of murder by Garnier. I am disgusted by a policy decision that may have been made erroneously by Veterans Affairs Canada. I am disgusted by the shameful behaviour of the Minister of Veterans Affairs. He comes in here every day full of pompous bravado, pounds his chest and rails against the opposition, but refuses to do anything to help our veterans and is allowing this murderer to be ahead of veterans in the line for services for things like PTSD. That is a lack of leadership, and I am disgusted by it. All of the veterans who have contacted us as members of Parliament are disgusted by the behaviour of the government and the failure of leadership by the Prime Minister in not interceding, correcting the behaviour of the Minister of Veterans Affairs and making sure these services are rescinded.

Let us look at the facts, because we are hearing all sorts of rhetoric from the Liberal benches. Christopher Garnier is not a veteran. He is 30 years old. He has never put on a uniform and there is no way he is entitled to any benefits from Veterans Affairs. The Liberals are claiming privacy because of his father, who was a veteran. However, let us be clear that these types of services are allowed for the dependant children and spouses of veterans, and they are still waiting in line while this non-dependant, 30-year-old adult is getting benefits that other families' loved ones should be receiving right now to deal with PTSD and operational stress injuries.

The fact is, if we look at the court case, as well as what has been reported in the media, Chris Garnier's father, Chris Garnier's lawyer, and Chris Garnier's psychologist all admitted in court and to the press that his PTSD is a direct result of his murder of Catherine Campbell. His PTSD is guilt and remorse for the vicious attack and the way he desecrated the body of his victim. He should never ever qualify for a Veterans Affairs benefit.

● (1650)

We need to keep in mind that Correctional Service Canada offers mental health and counselling services to all those who are incarcerated. There is no reason why Veterans Affairs Canada should ever feel it needs to provide service to anyone who is incarcerated. It has every opportunity to provide those services through other government agencies, and Correctional Service Canada has those services readily available to convicts right across the country.

We heard during question period, while we were hammering away at the Minister of Veterans Affairs for his ridiculous answers and shameful behaviour and his disrespect toward veterans, especially the family of Catherine Campbell, that the Liberals were going to rescind this policy. However, if we look at the details of what was announced, they are trying to provide cover for the minister, who still refuses to rescind the benefits of Christopher Garnier.

Throughout question period, we heard the Minister of Veterans Affairs hide behind privacy and say over and over again that he is going to stand by our veterans. First, Christopher Garnier is not a veteran. He should never receive veterans benefits. No adult child of a veteran gets any benefits from Veterans Affairs Canada. If the minister is so convinced that he needs to stand by our veterans, what would he do in the case of former Colonel Russell Williams, who was a serial killer? When we were in government and found that out, we rescinded all of his veterans benefits and his veterans pension, because he should not be entitled to any of those as an incarcerated serial killer. Therefore, how can the minister today stand in this place and say that he will stand by any veteran, despite any heinous crime they commit, when the precedent was set by our former Conservative government that we would not provide benefits to someone like Russell Williams, a former colonel in the air force?

The minister talks about standing by our veterans. Well, Sean Bruyea is suing the minister for defamation of character. That is how the minister acts. He stands by everyone, but look how he is treating Vice-Admiral Mark Norman. It is his government that is taking him to court for something he never did.

We keep hearing from the Liberal benches. We hear from the members for Winnipeg Centre and Winnipeg North. They get up and talk about all of the things they are doing. However, let us look at the real metrics of what the Liberals have done for veterans. Wait times under the Liberals have gone up from 16 weeks to seven months. Veterans are waiting longer under the Liberal government to get the benefits they are entitled to.

We just heard announced this past week that veterans are now going to be denied service dogs for PTSD, despite all of the research showing a significant reduction in PTSD symptoms among our veterans from those dogs. What is Veterans Affairs doing under the minister? It is going to take away this great animal husbandry program that provided companionship for veterans and reduced the impact of their PTSD and other operational stress injuries. Also, even though the Prime Minister promised he would not take veterans back to court, it was this minister who actually beat veterans in court with the Equitas lawsuit. What a great track record we have here.

Of course, the Liberals have cut $372 million in veterans benefits as a result of lapsed funding over their three-year tenure. I guess when the Prime Minister stood in Edmonton and told a veteran right to his face in a town hall meeting that he was "asking for more than we are able to give", it proves the point that they had the money. They just do not want to spend it on our veterans.

The benefits program is just a shell game. It is not a pension for life. It is just a bunch of programs they put together and tried to reinvent the wheel with.

In closing, if there are any members on the Liberal bench who want to stand up for our veterans, rather than stand for their Minister of Veterans Affairs, they should stand tonight and vote yes for this motion and ensure that we stop and rescind all of the policies and programs that are being offered to Christopher Garnier.

● (1655)

Mr. John Oliver (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had a number of round tables with veterans from my riding of Oakville about three years ago to ask how things were for them and whether they were able to access services. I heard uniformly that they were having difficulty accessing services. I heard from a mother whose son had served, a veteran who suffered from PTSD, and the concerns she had about adequate support and adequate treatment for veterans.

That is why I am so glad to see that our government has been reinvesting in veterans, has opened the new centre of excellence for post-traumatic stress disorder, and has launched the joint suicide prevention strategy along with the Canadian Armed Forces.

My question to the member is, where was he? Where was he during the 10 years when the Conservatives lost the trust of the veterans community? Where was he when it came to improving mental health services? Where was he when the Auditor General said that the Conservatives were not doing enough to facilitate veterans' timely access to mental health services and benefits? Where was he during that decade?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I should remind the member that I was the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of National Defence. I went across this country and met with our ill and injured. I actually opened the centre of excellence at the Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre that helps support our troops and our veterans in actually moving ahead in dealing with PTSD and operational stress injuries.

Where was that member? He said he met with veterans three years ago? Why has he not met with them in the last three years? If he met with veterans groups today, as I do, he would know that they are disgusted by the government and the way it is using veterans as props rather than actually delivering services.

All we have to do is look at the metrics I have put out there. There is $372 million in lapsed funding through Veterans Affairs. Wait times for veterans have gone from 16 weeks, which is the mark, to seven months under the Liberal government. That is shameful.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect for my colleague. We sit on the defence committee together. From time to time, we actually see eye to eye. However, I regret that this is not one of those issues.

The reality of the situation is that the member has been trying to characterize the former Conservative government as a friend of veterans, when in reality, that was not the case. Let us look at some of the facts: killing lifetime pensions for veterans; closing nine veterans affairs offices; and forcing a court to instruct the former Conservative government to pay $887 million to veterans.

How can the member possibly claim that the former Conservative government was doing great things for veterans, when the record shows completely otherwise?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, my friend from Kingston and the Islands should not throw stones at glass houses.

Let us actually look at the facts. The Liberals talk about opening offices, but they have actually extended the wait times. Veterans are waiting up to seven months for services. That is not performance. The member talks about money not spent. There is $372 million of lapsed funding under the Liberals.

People need to actually look at doing things for our veterans. That is why I was so happy that at our national policy convention in Halifax this summer, we brought forward a new policy called duty of care, which says:

> The Conservative Party of Canada, recognizes and accepts unreservedly the existence of a Social Covenant between the Government of Canada and those who have served in the Armed Forces of Canada (The Military Covenant).

We are going to honour that. The member talked about ending lifetime pensions. We have to remember that this happened under the Paul Martin government when it brought forward the new veterans charter. Again, the member needs to get his facts straight.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his impassioned speech.

In my riding of North Island—Powell River, I have numerous veterans I work with frequently. I can think of one right now who has a service dog that really helps him with his post-traumatic stress disorder. He cannot find housing, because they do not take dogs.

When we look at the gaps in services, we really need to commend the people, like those at the Comox Military Family Resource Centre in my riding, who work day in and day out with these veterans.

Could the member talk about what it really means for veterans on the ground when over $300 million is left on the table, when there are services and needs veterans have today?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend from North Island—Powell River, a beautiful riding that I have had the opportunity to visit a couple of times. I met with the military family resource centre there, along with the JPSU and the integrated personnel support centre. They do great work.

To know that there is money on the table that is not being used for things like PTSD service dogs for those veterans who need those services is really disappointing. All the research shows, both Canadian and American research, that those service dogs do a great job.

The more we can do to support veterans, like those in her riding, the better off we are going to be as a nation and the better off we will be finding people who want to serve in uniform, knowing that they will be properly cared for by having in place a military covenant.

● (1700)

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member of Parliament for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman for his continuing support for veterans, both in his riding and across the country.

I have some very serious concerns about how this particular debate has been unfolding. Let us start with how we got to this point. In this case, when citizens learned that a man convicted of murdering a female police officer was receiving veterans benefits and then learned that this particular man was not a veteran and has never served, it created a strong level of outrage. Let us also be clear that these concerns came first and foremost from the family of the victim. I mention that so we can be perfectly clear that this was not something dreamt up by the opposition party. These are legitimate concerns raised by the family of a murdered police officer, concerns raised by veterans who know full well that this was never what post-traumatic stress disorder benefits were created for and finally, concerns raised by everyday Canadians.

Even the Liberals' own veterans minister has conceded and stated in this place that "there are many of us who are uncomfortable with the decision that was made."

What happened next? Well, we know that the Prime Minister was asked about this. What did he have to say? This Prime Minister demonstrated an unaccountable level of arrogance when he told Canadians that he would not answer questions on this subject, that for some reason, he should not be held accountable for this decision. It is all part of the same pattern of a Prime Minister who has one set of rules for everyone else but a very different set of rules for himself and his inner circle. He says that these questions are playing politics with tragedy and he will not answer them. He even called these questions "disgusting political games".

What happened next? The minister did his usual tap dance, and of course, the go-to Liberal talking point was to blame Harper. This, of course, is how Liberals try to cover for their ongoing failure, despite the fact that they are three years into their own term. Keep in mind, it was not previous prime minister Harper who set Liberals' own performance standards on serving veterans, which we learned recently has resulted in the Liberal government failing to even meet its own veterans service targets.

Despite these failures to serve actual veterans, somehow the government found a way to provide veterans benefits to a cop killer who was never a veteran. Now, this outraged the family of the victim. As well, we have cases where veterans are in court fighting the Liberal government to fulfill its promises made to veterans. Veterans see a convicted murderer, who is not a veteran, receiving the benefits they fought for, and in some cases are still fighting for. That creates a level of outrage, and people are going to ask the Prime Minister why it is happening under his watch.

This Prime Minister may not like the question, but to call it a disgusting political game and then refuse to answer? Would this Prime Minister seriously pick up the phone and accuse the family of the victim of playing disgusting political games because they are outraged by this decision by his own government? That is what this is about: accountability. This family wants answers. This family deserves answers.

● (1705)

Earlier today, the minister joined this debate, and I followed his comments closely. Only at the very end of his speech did he actually address the issue we are debating. The minister told us that if veterans services are being received by a family member of a veteran when they are not related to the veteran's service-related illness or injury, the case will be reviewed by a senior official before a decision is rendered. Let us fast forward to this afternoon when we were in question period. While in question period, the CBC released a report that entirely contradicted what the minister told this place this morning. CBC now reports that Veterans Affairs Canada will no longer "pay for benefits for incarcerated relatives of veterans in the wake of the Christopher Garnier case."

While I believe that many Canadians will strongly support this new policy, it does raise a few troubling questions. Why did the minister tell us something completely different this morning? Why was the minister in this place during question period arguing in favour of the do-nothing approach? Why is it that we only learned of this important new policy from the CBC and not from the minister during question period? Seriously, is the minister even running his own department?

On the weekend, we witnessed a minister responsible for border security who clearly has no idea what is going on in his department, and now this today. This, of course, all comes back to what I view as the core problem here. Let me recap first.

When this subject first arose, the Prime Minister called it "disgusting political games" and refused to answer it, yet here we are. Not only has the question been validated but the department has actually changed its policy because of it.

Let me quote again. CBC now reports, "Veterans Affairs Canada will not pay for benefits for incarcerated relatives of veterans in the wake of the Christopher Garnier case." I repeat, "in the wake of the Christopher Garnier case." It was never a foolish political game. Those were real concerns from real people. For the Prime Minister to simply blow them off with his usual habit of trying to shame anyone who dares to expect accountability from him is getting tired.

It also points to a pattern with the Prime Minister. In the past, when the Prime Minister did not like uncomfortable questions, he would often accuse the opposition of throwing mud. Many of those uncomfortable questions led to the Prime Minister and members of his own cabinet being found guilty of ethics violations. In other words, I am seeing a bit of a pattern. When the Prime Minister hits the mass outrage button over a question he does not like, all too often it is because he does not know the answer. He just does not want to reveal it. Generally, this only applies to the Prime Minister and his inner circle, one of which is the Veterans Affairs minister. This matter has shown us that the Prime Minister needs to be more accountable to Canadians.

Now I will go back to the topic at hand. We can commend the department for changing this policy, thanks to the concern raised by the opposition. I say thanks to the department, because the minister clearly knew nothing about it. Otherwise we would have learned about this policy change from him instead of from the CBC during question period today.

That leaves only one important unanswered question. We know that Veterans Affairs will no longer pay for benefits for the incarcerated relatives of veterans. What we do not know is whether the Liberal government will stop providing veterans benefits to Christopher Garnier. We have asked this of the minister repeatedly. He has refused to answer, and he hides behind his department. In fairness to the minister, perhaps like this most recent policy change, he does not know. Maybe he is waiting for his department to tell the CBC, so it can tell us. Whatever the answer is, the minister has had ample opportunity to provide a simple answer, and he refuses to do so.

This is not ministerial accountability in this place. Everyone in this place knows that. We can all send a message to the minister, who is a BF to the Prime Minister. We can vote to stop these benefits. That is what I am asking all members in this place to do: join with the Conservatives in saying "no more" in this case. That is what this motion is about, and that is what it should remain when we stand in our places today and vote as hon. members.

● (1710)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in some of my interventions today, I shared my dismay that we are not debating policy here, that we are not actually debating what we could be doing differently and setting the policy that directs this in a way that would prevent something like this from happening in the future. I am wondering if the member opposite can share his insight into how he would develop this policy in such a way that certain thresholds would be adhered to in terms of where the tolerance level is and for what general activities there would be a tolerance level.

Can the member contribute to a policy objective rather than just trying to pick on one particular scenario that occurred?

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, there is outrage from the family, outrage from veterans and outrage from Canadians in regard to this specific case.

Now the department has changed the policy, but the minister has shown less than to dignify us with a proper response. The member wants to talk about policy, but when policies are put in place and people start falling through the cracks, when there are failures and gaps in that policy, then it is up to backbench MPs and not just the opposition to go to their Parliament here to hold the government and their ministers to account. That is exactly what we are supposed to do.

The member can try and say if we only had the perfect policy, but then we would not need ministers anymore, and we would not need MPs anymore. We are here to fight for our constituents to make sure their voices are being heard. We want that member to hear that.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is my first occasion rising in the debate today, because I am troubled by it. I am having trouble with it, and obviously every Canadian is offended by the idea that a convicted murderer is getting benefits from Veterans Affairs even though that person was never a veteran. On the face of it, it is outrageous, and that is what troubles me.

We are having an entire debate about a specific personal instance. I am going to vote for the Conservative motion. I do not see any reason that I would not. However, the difficulty I have is that I have respect for the Minister of Veterans Affairs. He appears tortured before us. He appears to have confidential information that he cannot divulge. If that were true, I am asking my friend for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, how would we explain this?

There is no political advantage for the minister to deflect as he has been doing. It entirely goes against political advantage. It is indefensible. Could the minister possibly have confidential information that he cannot divulge? That is the part I am really struggling with here.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I would certainly want to hear the member of Parliament for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman answer the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, but she will have to settle for another member from B.C.

I go back to when we see a policy and a specific case where it is fundamentally wrong, and all of us feel that in this place, then the minister should not simply say, "Well, there are concerns", and then huddle back. He had 29 days to address this. That is not accountability.

I would like to see more accountability from the government. I will be voting in favour of the Conservative supply day motion. I am happy to hear that the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands will stand with us on this issue. I really do hope that Liberal members consider standing with us as well.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1755)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negatived on the following division:)

(Division No. 887)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif
Albrecht
Allison
Arnold
Barlow
Benson
Bergen
Bezan
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Boudrias
Boutin-Sweet
Brosseau
Cannings
Carrie
Cooper
Davies
Diotte
Donnelly
Dubé
Dusseault
Eglinski
Falk (Provencher)
Gallant
Généreux
Gladu
Gourde
Harder
Hughes
Johnson
Kelly
Kitchen
Kwan
Laverdière
Lloyd
Lukiwski
MacKenzie
Malcolmson
Martel
Mathyssen
McCauley (Edmonton West)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Moore
Albas
Allerslev
Anderson
Ashton
Beaulieu
Benzen
Berthold
Blaikie
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Boulerice
Brassard
Calkins
Caron
Chong
Cullen
Deltell
Doherty
Dreeshen
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
Duvall
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Finley
Garrison
Genuis
Godin
Hardcastle
Hoback
Johns
Julian
Kent
Kusie
Lake
Leitch
Lobb
MacGregor
Maguire
Marcil
Masse (Windsor West)
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McColeman
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Motz
Nantel
Nicholson
O'Toole
Plamondon
Quach
Ramsey
Rayes
Rempel
Sansoucy
Scheer
Shields
Sopuck
Ste-Marie
Strahl
Thériault
Trost
Van Kesteren
Viersen
Warkentin
Webber
Wong
Zimmer — 127

Nater
Obhrai
Pauzé
Poilievre
Raitt
Rankin
Reid
Richards
Saroya
Schmale
Shipley
Stanton
Stetski
Sweet
Tilson
Trudel
Vecchio
Warawa
Waugh
Weir
Yurdiga

NAYS

Members

Alghabra
Anandasangaree
Bagnell
Beech
Bittle
Boissonnault
Bratina
Brison
Casey (Charlottetown)
Champagne
Dabrusin
DeCourcey
Dhillon
Dubourg
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
El-Khoury
Erskine-Smith
Eyolfson
Fillmore
Fisher
Fragiskatos
Fry
Garneau
Goldsmith-Jones
Gould
Grewal
Harvey
Hehr
Holland
Hutchings
Jordan
Khalid
Lambropoulos
Lamoureux
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Lebouthillier
Leslie
Lightbound
Long
Ludwig
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
McCrimmon
McGuinty
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
Mendicino
Monsef
Murray
Ng
Oliphant
O'Regan
Peschisolido
Philpott
Poissant
Ratansi
Rodriguez

Rogers	Romanado
Rota	Rudd
Rumy	Rusnak
Sahota	Saini
Sajjan	Sangha
Sarai	Scarpaleggia
Schiefke	Schulte
Serré	Shanahan
Sheehan	Sidhu (Mission — Matsqui — Fraser Canyon)
Sidhu (Brampton South)	Sikand
Simms	Sohi
Sorbara	Spengemann
Tabbara	Tan
Tassi	Vandal
Vandenbeld	Vaughan
Virani	Whalen
Wilkinson	Wilson-Raybould
Wrzesnewskyj	Young
Zahid — 151	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

It being 5:55 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY ACT

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC) moved that Bill C-316, An Act to amend the Canada Revenue Agency Act (organ donors), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, for those who may not already know, I have been a long-time advocate of organ and tissue donation in Canada. In fact, a few years ago I passed a bill in the Alberta legislature as an MLA, resulting in the creation of the Alberta Organ and Tissue Donation Registry. It also put in place a strong and robust education and awareness program that included adding donor hearts to our Alberta driver's licences.

However, the reality is 4,600 Canadians are still awaiting a life-saving transplant and we need to do more to find those critical matches to save more lives. This is an issue that transcends political lines and offers us, as parliamentarians, the opportunity to make a difference in every corner of this country.

The Humboldt Broncos tragedy last spring highlighted the issue across Canada when Logan Boulet signed up as an organ donor just weeks before his tragic death. This incredibly kind gesture prompted thousands more to register, but it is still not enough because while over 90% of Canadians say they support organ donation, only 25%—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Everyone, debate is taking place and I am having a hard time hearing what the hon. member for Calgary Confederation is saying. I want to remind you that if you have a conversation maybe just either keep it down or go outside.

The hon. member for Calgary Confederation.

● (1800)

Mr. Len Webber: I will continue from where I left off, Mr. Speaker.

The Humboldt Broncos tragedy last spring highlighted the issue across Canada when Logan Boulet signed up as an organ donor just weeks before his tragic death. This incredibly kind gesture prompted thousands more to register, but it is still not enough. While over 90% of Canadians say that they support organ donation, only 25% are registered. In the meantime, hundreds die every year waiting for a donor. Sadly, Canada has one of the lowest donation rates in the world. A single organ donor can save up to eight people and a single tissue donor can help up to 75 individuals.

My bill, Bill C-316, proposes a very simple, very effective method to increase the size of the organ donor base here in Canada. It would also help update existing databases, but most important it would save lives. I am proposing that we use the annual tax form to ask Canadians if they would like to become a registered organ donor and if they consent to have this information passed to their provincial government for addition to its existing organ donor registries.

Before I go further, I must thank the 20 members of Parliament from all parties in the House who have stepped forward to officially second my bill. I will just let that sink in. There are members from all political parties in this House who have signed on as official seconders to this bill. That is a rare occurrence indeed. This extraordinary non-partisan approach demonstrates how a sensible idea can bring us together as a House to improve the lives of all Canadians. This collaborative approach has extended to the health committee, the committee that I serve on along with nine other colleagues of mine who have been extremely supportive of improving the organ and tissue donation situation here in Canada, and I deeply appreciate the support on this issue and with this bill.

This is not a political issue; it is a human issue. Any one of us could be in need of donor organs or tissues at any time. Just asking this simple question could increase the number of donors. Just recently, donor registration jumped up 15% in British Columbia when drivers were asked directly at licensing locations across the province if they wanted to be donors. It jumped up 15%, so we can imagine what we can do on a national scale.

Tax forms, by law, are restricted to collecting data for the purposes of taxation only. This is why we need to amend the law to allow for this common-sense approach to a national problem. My bill is modelled on the successful inclusion on the tax form of the question asking Canadians if they want Elections Canada to be kept informed of their current information. My bill has been crafted in keeping with this successful precedent.

Other initiatives to improve organ donation have been voted down in the past here in this House of Commons, as some felt the proposals were an infringement on provincial jurisdiction. My bill would not infringe on the provincial responsibility of managing donor lists; it would just support their existing work. My proposal is so simple and could be implemented so quickly. The federal government, via the Canada Revenue Agency, already successfully shares data every day with all the provinces and territories via encrypted networks with strong and reliable privacy safeguards. In addition, the existing infrastructure would support this change at virtually no cost. The CRA already shares dozens of data fields of information on every taxpayer with the provinces and territories and this would simply be one more data exchange. The tax form is a way to update this information annually via a legally binding document. It would allow for provincial lists to remain current and relevant.

While some methods used by the provinces such as driver's licences and health care cards help register donors, as they do, none has as far a reach as the tax form.

● (1805)

The existing voluntary online method of registering is neither proactive nor fully effective. For example, those who move from one province to another rarely update their information. The tax form approach overcomes these common problems.

As the federal government would simply be collecting the data and passing it to the provinces, we would not be opening the jurisdictional can of worms. The federal government would not be encroaching on provincial jurisdiction because we are not setting up a federal registry. We would provide the information to the province and it would use the information as it sees fit. The provinces would still maintain their own lists. We would just be supplying them with data for that purpose.

When someone dies, the tax department is often one of the first government agencies to be notified. This too would help update provincial registries and keep them current. This is a huge opportunity for the House to show leadership in organ and tissue donation efforts.

Stakeholders have been universally supportive of the bill, and the thousands of affected families with loved ones on waiting lists will welcome this additional help. One stakeholder, the Ontario Trillium Gift of Life Network, is the largest registry in Canada. Its CEO, Ronnie Gavsie, says:

> ...we would support creating an opportunity for Canadians, when filing their income tax returns, to register their consent for organ and tissue donation.... The online income tax return becomes a gateway and an annual reminder to drive Canadians to organ and tissue donor registration.
>
> We share with you the goal of substantially improving awareness of organ and tissue donation and improving health for Canadians by increasing the number of life-saving transplants.

The federal agency responsible for organ donation is Canadian Blood Services and its vice-president, Dr. Isra Levy, said:

> Just like our colleagues, we support a transactional touchpoint that will raise the awareness, especially if it leads to the conversation.... But for sure this is something to be welcomed.

Elizabeth Myles of the Kidney Foundation of Canada has written to the Prime Minister expressing the foundation's support for this change. Dr. Amit Garg of the Canadian Society of Nephrology, a society of physicians and scientists specializing in the care of kidney disease, and Dr. West of the Canadian National Transplant Research Program also expressed their strong support for the bill. The list goes on. Support for this legislation reaches far and wide across the country, into every community.

The health committee just tabled a report on organ donation this very morning in the House, with a number of key recommendations. The committee wanted to know what role the federal government could play in strengthening Canada's organ donor donation and transplantation system. One of the key recommendations in the report deals directly with the debate we are having right now. If this bill is passed, it would go a long way toward fulfilling that key recommendation. We have the opportunity to leverage the resources of the federal government to help our provincial and territorial partners improve their registries, and I hope we do.

I and, most importantly, 4,600 Canadians awaiting life-saving transplant hope we can count on all MPs to support the bill.

I want to deeply thank a particular individual, a friend, Mr. Robert Sallows of Calgary. Robert received a double lung transplant 13 and a half years ago, at the age of 17, which granted him a new lease on life. Since having the transplant he has been very active within Alberta and Canada, raising organ and tissue donation awareness. He helped me immensely with the passage of my bill in the Alberta legislature, which created the Alberta organ donor registry. Sadly, Robert has recently entered the palliative care process. I want him to know that his determination, his struggle and his advocacy for organ and tissue donation have provided me with so much inspiration and motivation to improve the lives of others in need of a transplant.

● (1810)

I dedicate this effort to my friend, Robert Sallows.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his devoted work on this file at the health committee. He was tenacious to ensure we had the conversation. I was so pleased to see the health committee come in today with a unanimous report on organ donation.

The member's proposal is a simple change to the tax form. Is there a cost implication at all related to that?

Mr. Len Webber: Mr. Speaker, as I stated in my speech, there is minimal, if any, cost with regard to implementing this change to the tax form, other than the ink to be printed on the forms.

It is a question that individuals would tick off a box, signalling whether they wished to be an organ donor. It would take virtually seconds to do. The cost is little to nothing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague from Calgary Confederation on his bill.

Organ donation is an extremely important issue in Canada. The Standing Committee on Health report presented on this topic was unanimously adopted this morning, which goes to show that this issue transcends party lines.

I want to say publicly that I will support my colleague's bill. On Thursday, I plan on moving a motion on this very subject.

Has my colleague consulted with provincial medical authorities? If so, what was their response?

[*English*]

Mr. Len Webber: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his ongoing work with regard to organ and tissue donation awareness. It is an honour to serve with him on the health committee. I respect the member immensely, and thank him sincerely for his support on this bill.

His motion will come up in a couple of days, and I absolutely support it. Any type of awareness of organ and tissue donation, any talk in the House, any talk around Canada is so important. It is important that as Canadians we ensure our families know that we wish to donate our organs upon death. Just signing the registry is not enough. What is in place right now is also the ability for families to trump those decisions, unless they know for certain this is something people wish to do.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the New Democratic Party, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague, the member for Calgary Confederation, who has done such wonderful work, putting organ donation not only before our committee but before the House and, by extension, before our country.

I have two questions for the member.

First, it is a wonderful idea to add a question to Canadians' tax returns in order to encourage people, on an annual basis, to consider being an organ donor. I think that will increase the rates of organ donation in the country. Of course it is only adults, probably over the age of 18, of working age, who file tax returns. Does the member have any ideas or suggestions as to how we can encourage Canadians who may fall between those cracks to become organ donors?

Second, as we have heard at committee, countries like Spain have extremely high levels of organ donation, probably due to a variety of factors, but primarily because they have a presumed consent system. All Spanish citizens are presumed to be organ donors, unless they specifically opt out. Does he have any comment or position on that as a potential way to help increase organ donor rates in our country.

● (1815)

Mr. Len Webber: Mr. Speaker, I applaud the hon. member from Vancouver for his work on the health committee and his devotion to organ and tissue donation as well. He is a great man, and I thank him for all his support on this bill.

With regard to young people who do not drive or do not do income tax returns because they are not income earners, there are many other ways to sign up on the registry, such as through BeADonor.ca. Any young adult can register as a donor.

With regard to the opt-out of presumed consent system in Spain, it is one of the recommendations in the report we tabled today. It is a recommendation to look into the opportunities involved with opting out of presumed consent. I look forward to the study on that from the government.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just put on my "Be a Donor" ribbon and assume I am allowed to wear it in the House.

I am pleased to rise today to speak in favour of Bill C-316. I want to applaud the member for Calgary Confederation for all of his tireless efforts on improving organ donations across Canada, first in Alberta and now here in the House of Commons.

Organ donation rates across the country are, quite frankly, pathetic. Here in Ontario, more than 85% of residents are in favour of organ donation, but only one in three Ontario residents has registered his or her consent to donate. This trend is similar across the country. There is clearly a disconnect between people's wishes and their actions and, sadly, without an individual registering in advance, the family is often faced with this decision at a time of crisis, dealing with the loss of a loved one when so many emotions are in play. Too often we have not discussed our wishes with our loved ones.

We know that health care delivery is a provincial responsibility and I applaud the member for finding a way to engage the federal government in this important issue while still respecting our constitutional jurisdictions. This bill would make it easier to gather information: a simple check mark on one's income tax return and, voilà, the information is passed on to the province of residence. A province can choose not to participate in the program if it so wishes. This is so important because while our provincial counterparts have made tremendous strides to raise awareness and registration rates, we are still not seeing donor registration rates rising as they should.

In 2012, when I was an Oakville town councillor, I was part of a group of Oakville residents who formed the Oakville Be a Donor group. It grew out of a call from Oakville resident Jennifer Malahar, who challenged the mayor and council to register as organ donors. Jennifer developed a kidney disease while pregnant with her first child, Arya.

Facing an eight-year wait for a kidney transplant or the prospect of dialysis, Jenn was the recipient of a kidney from her husband Hitesh Patel, on their wedding anniversary no less. Hitesh later joined me for the Courage Polar Bear Dip wearing a Be a Donor T-shirt to raise awareness for organ donation. They later welcomed their second child, Sage, and the family continues to thrive.

Through the Oakville Be a Donor group, I met the most amazing people: Bev Cathro, who donated her kidney to her young daughter, and Ron Newman, affectionately known as the "Dialysis Dude", who received a kidney transplant and lived dialysis free for many years, but is now back on dialysis as he waits for another donor. Ron continues to advocate and also organizes the Halton Kidney Walk every year.

Julie Pehar, whose experience was a different one, came to our group having lost a loved one and having made the decision to donate his organs.

Sarah Taylor and Keith Childerhose is a love story that played out as Keith struggled to breathe. In need of a lung transplant, Sarah took to social media to publicize Keith's challenges. They appeared in the news as Keith waited for a double lung transplant.

Keith was failing quickly and was on life support. He had been living with diffuse panbronchiolitis from the age of 25 and had been fighting the disease for 15 years. This severe and rare disease caused fluid to continually build up in his lungs, similar to cystic fibrosis. On life support, the news came that Keith was heading into a 10-hour surgery as a donor had been found. In one of the most touching photos ever taken, with Keith hooked up to an IV and tubes, looking into each other's eyes, Keith touched Sarah's nose as she touched his hand.

The good news is that the surgery was a success and brought much-needed attention to the need for organ donation. In a lovely twist to the story, the two were engaged, then won a wedding package and were married in 2013. As wonderful as Keith's and Sarah's story is, sadly, across our country there are too many stories like Keith's that do not have a happy ending.

Our Oakville Be a Donor group gathered together the Interfaith Council of Halton, community leaders and politicians to create a poster to be displayed around town. How pleased I was recently to visit the Halton police station and see our poster still hanging on the walls of the offices.

Despite our efforts to raise awareness, registration rates across Canada are dismal. I want to share some statistics from the Ontario Be a Donor website. In Ontario, there are over 1,500 people waiting for a life-saving organ transplant. This is their only treatment option and every three days someone will die because they did not get their transplant in time.

● (1820)

One donor can save up to eight lives through organ donation and enhance the lives of up to 75 people through the gift of tissue. Age alone does not disqualify someone from becoming a donor. The oldest organ donor was over 90, and the oldest tissue donor was over 100. There is always the potential to be a donor, and it should not stop someone from registering. Anyone over the age of 16 can register.

Current or past medical history does not prevent someone from registering to be a donor. Individuals with serious illnesses can sometimes be organ or tissue donors. Each potential donor is evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

All major religions support organ and tissue donation or respect an individual's choice.

Organ and tissue donation does not impact funeral plans. An open-casket funeral is possible.

Right now, there are over 1,100 people in Ontario waiting for a kidney and 252 people waiting for a liver, and 46 of those on the wait-list are under the age 17.

When we register, we give hope to the thousands of Canadians waiting for a transplant. Those on the transplant wait list are often living with organ failure, like my friend Ron Newman. Tissue donors can enhance the lives of recovering burn victims, help restore sight and allow people to walk again. Transplants not only save lives, they return recipients to productive lives.

As I speak today in support of Bill C-316, I want to remember my friend Bob Hepburn. Bob was a generous and kind soul, a teacher-librarian who was a role model for hundreds of students at Abbey Park High School in Oakville and best friend to Tim Robertson. Bob was generous beyond words, so much so that he was twice a living donor, once donating his bone marrow and another time his kidney. Bob died quite suddenly a few months ago, and those to whom he had given the gift of life came to his funeral.

I thank my colleague across the floor, the member for Calgary Confederation. I know that this is an issue he has been committed to for years. I am proud to call him a friend and even prouder to have been asked to be a seconder of this bill. It is my sincere hope that Canadians will soon have another simple option to register as donors on their income tax returns, thanks to his private member's bill.

Those who are watching today should talk to their loved ones about their wishes and go online and register today. In Ontario, they can go to www.beadonor.ca right now. It only takes two minutes to register.

I ask all members of this House for their support for Bill C-316. This bill would create a simple way for Canadians to register as organ donors. It is my sincere hope that when Canadians file their income taxes in the near future, they can just click on a box to have the federal government notify their province of residence of their wish to register.

● (1825)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-316, an act to amend the Canada Revenue Agency Act (organ donors). I would like to once again express my congratulations and thanks to the hon. member for Calgary Confederation for all his hard work on this issue.

This legislation would give authority to the federal government to coordinate with the provinces and territories to allow Canadians to register as organ donors through their federal tax filings.

Canada's New Democrats will be supporting this measure, because we believe that it will help to increase registration rates. Organ donation registration has been proven to be transaction based, and tax filings represent a transaction that millions of Canadians engage in every year.

Indeed, this legislation aligns closely with the NDP's long-standing advocacy and legislative work around organ donation.

For over a decade, New Democrats have been working to create a pan-Canadian organ donor registry to coordinate and promote organ donation throughout Canada. Legislation to create such a registry has been introduced by New Democrat MPs on five occasions: in 2002, 2003, 2008, 2009 and 2013.

Unfortunately, our federal government over the last 16 years has not been able to muster the will to implement this policy.

In February 2016, the Conservative member for Edmonton Manning, whose own son has been the recipient of three donated livers, reintroduced this private member's legislation, Bill C-223, with the unanimous support of the NDP. Unfortunately, the Liberal government voted to block that bipartisan effort. Canada's New Democrats were profoundly disappointed to see the Liberals rush to this determination without even sending the bill to committee for study.

One donor can save up to eight lives and benefit more than 75 people. However, at 18 donors per million people, Canada's current donation rate puts us in the lower third of developed countries. In fact, Canadians are currently dying on wait-lists because our organ donation rate is so low. In 2016, there were 4,500 Canadians on the recipient wait-list, and 260 died waiting for a transplant.

In order to address this unacceptable shortfall, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health agreed to study Canada's organ and tissue donation procurement system in March 2016, once again as a result of the initiative of my hon. colleague from Calgary Confederation.

As part of this study, the committee heard from a range of witnesses, including representatives from Canadian Blood Services, provincial organ donation and procurement organizations, researchers, health care providers and charities. The committee learned that although some jurisdictions in Canada are considered centres of excellence in organ donation and transplantation, others lack the resources and capacity to adopt best practices in this area.

As a result, the rate of donors varies significantly by region in Canada. In 2013, Quebec had the most deceased donors, with 20.2 per million population. Manitoba and Saskatchewan, on the other hand, had only 7.2 per million. British Columbia is Canada's living donor capital, with 28 living donors per million people.

The committee also heard that limited public awareness and public discourse about organ donation mean there are also challenges related to consent for organ donation in Canada. In addition, witnesses called for more research and better data collection across Canada to help identify potential organ donors within healthcare systems and improve treatment outcomes for transplant patients.

New Democrats hope that the committee's report, tabled earlier today, and its seven recommendations will place a renewed focus on the need for federal leadership to improve Canada's organ and tissue donation system.

In particular, we are pleased that the report contains a recommendation calling for study of a presumed consent or opt-out system for organ donation, an idea that New Democrats believe could make a huge difference in the number of organs available to save lives. Unlike Canada's current opt-in system, an opt-out approach would automatically register all citizens for organ donation unless they choose to indicate otherwise.

Countries with opt-out systems consistently record higher donation rates than opt-in countries. Indeed, this approach has helped to make Spain a world leader in organ donation over the past 25 years. In Austria, the donor rate quadrupled after instituting opt-out legislation, and similar regulations in Belgium doubled kidney donations.

I would be remiss not to mention that during the committee's study, it became clear that there is tremendous confusion over whether gay men are eligible to be organ donors in Canada.

● (1830)

One could be forgiven for confusion on this point, since sexually active gay men are currently banned from donating blood in Canada. However, under regulations first enacted in 2007, men who have sex with men are eligible to be organ donors on a case-by-case basis. Apparently in our country, one can take a gay man's heart but not his blood.

Helen Kennedy, executive director of the LGBTQ2 advocacy organization Egale Canada, has described this approach as outrageous.

Dr. Paul MacPherson, an HIV researcher with the Ottawa Hospital Research Institute's chronic disease program, has been clear that this ban does not match the science.

For men in stable long-term relationships, the risks associated with blood donation are exactly the same as those for a heterosexual couple. Given this, Canada should adopt a blood donor policy that is evidence-based, gender neutral and behaviour-based.

Although, by this standard, Canada's organ donation system also perpetuates harmful stereotypes based on risk categories that cannot be justified by the science. This policy leads to confusion for potential donors and an inconsistent application of the rules, which can have immensely tragic consequences.

When the Prime Minister spoke to Egale Canada this past May, he appeared to agree that the rules for blood and organ donation needed to be changed. In fact, he named "discrimination in blood and organ donation" as among the next frontiers of the LGBTQ2 movement.

However, it is difficult to comprehend the Prime Minister's call for advocacy when it is already within his power to end this discriminatory federal policy. In fact, in the last election, the Liberal Party pledged to end the ban on gay men donating blood, saying that this policy ignored scientific evidence and must end. Instead, the Liberal government simply reduced the celibacy period from five years to one year. This perpetuates discrimination against gay men. The New Democrats call for it to end now.

It is time for the Liberal government to finally live up to its word by ensuring Canada's blood and organ donation policies are truly non-discriminatory and based on science.

I wish to conclude my remarks today by strongly encouraging all Canadians to register as organ donors and to discuss their wishes with their loved ones. One donor can save up to eight lives through organ donation and enhance the lives of up to 75 more through the gift of tissue. There is always the potential to be a donor, so people should not let anything stop them from registering.

Each potential donor is evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Current or past medical history does not prevent anyone from registering. Individuals with serious illnesses can also sometimes be organ and tissue donors.

All major religions support organ and tissue donation or respect an individual's choice. Age alone is not a barrier to being a donor. Therefore, I ask people to please consider giving the gift of life.

I wish to reiterate the NDP's support for the vital initiative before us today and affirm our commitment to ensuring every Canadian who needs an organ or tissue transplant receives it. No one should ever die because the call did not come in time.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise tonight to speak in support of the private member's bill brought forth by the member for Calgary Confederation, Bill C-316.

This legislation would amend the Canada Revenue Agency Act to allow Canadians to use their annual income tax returns to register as organ and tissue donors. The agency would be able to enter into agreements with provincial and territorial governments to collect this valuable information, which would then be passed on to the provinces and the territories and be used for the purpose of establishing or even maintaining their organ donor registries.

No information would be passed along to an individual's province or territory of residence unless that individual had authorized the Canada Revenue Agency to do so in the income tax return. As a result, respect for the privacy of Canadians would continue to be of the utmost importance under the bill.

Bill C-316 seeks to address a very serious problem within our health care system facing many Canadians.

Canadian Blood Services estimates 4,500 people across this country are on wait-lists every year to get critical organ transplants that have the potential to save lives. Unfortunately, these organ transplants are not always readily available and the consequences are devastating. To this effect, Canadian Blood Services also reports that on average, 250 Canadians die each year waiting for a transplant. It could be someone's mom, dad, grandma or grandfather.

In 2016 alone, over 4,500 people were waiting for transplants but only 2,835 organs were transplanted. Two hundred and sixty people died that year while waiting for organ transplants. These tragic losses are totally unacceptable and Canadians recognize this major problem. However we can fix this problem and make change for the better. We need to take action to help as many Canadians as possible receive the potentially life-saving organ and tissue transplants that they desperately need.

One of the primary goals of the bill is to give Canadians an annual opportunity to register as organ and tissue donors in a way that is totally simple and cost effective. Provinces and territories would still have the constitutional authority over the establishment and the maintenance of these organ donor registries.

The bill would also allow provincial and territorial governments to use existing resources within the Canada Revenue Agency to assist in the collection of organ donor information in a way that respects the privacy of all Canadians.

The bill is so important because it would make it easier for all Canadians to register as organ donors by simply including the information on their income tax returns.

The Canadian Transplant Society states that while over 90% of Canadians support organ and tissue donation, fewer than 20% of Canadians have actually made plans to donate. For Canadians who wish to register as organ and tissue donors, the process should not be complicated. Canadians should be able to indicate their choice to be an organ or tissue donor in a way that is clear and accessible for all Canadians. Bill C-316 seeks to support this objective for the sake of both organ donors and the thousands of Canadians waiting for critical organ transplants each and every year.

Bill C-316 represents a sensible solution that has the potential to help thousands of Canadians in need and benefit the lives of many more.

Tonight I would like to share two stories with the House, one of an organ recipient and the other of an organ donor family.

● (1835)

Shammi Rathwell is a constituent of mine in Saskatoon—Grasswood. I have known Shammi and her husband, George, for many years. Shammi was 42 years old when her doctor detected a heart murmur. Medication did not fix the issue, and after open-heart surgery to repair a valve, it was determined that the only option to correct this issue was a heart transplant. Shammi, in September 1991, went on the list. She was fortunate. Two months later, she was called.

To quote Shammi, "From the beginning, my transplant went very well. I did have a brief rejection early, but once that was resolved, I have been able to live a full and productive life. It will be 17 years this coming November. I have watched my girls grow, become educated. In fact, one just got married, and I can't wait someday to be a grandmother. I am so thankful to my donor for the gift of life. The family must have been in deep grief and yet made the decision to donate the organ which saved my life. I don't know who my donor family is, but I think of them very often and thank them every day."

Shammi Rathwell fully endorses Bill C-316.

The second story I want to share with members deals with the tragic accident of the Humboldt Bronco bus this past April that claimed the lives of 16 people.

Logan Boulet was one of the players who died in that accident on Friday night, but the story of this heroic 21-year-old certainly needs to be told. Just the summer before, in Lethbridge, a mentor of Logan's, an athletic trainer named Rick, suddenly passed away. Logan found out that Rick had signed the donor registry earlier in Alberta. He decided then that when he turned 21, he too would respect Rick and follow him to sign the registry in Alberta.

When this tragic accident happened on April 6, his parents, Bernadine and Toby, who I spoke with at length last night in Lethbridge, knew to carry out the wishes of their only son, Logan. Saturday morning, in the hospital in Saskatoon, Bernadine had one simple request. Her request was to hear Logan's heartbeat for the final time. She laid her head on his chest before the doctors proceeded with the successful organ recovery.

Even though Logan has passed, Bernadine and Toby know that their son's heart is beating somewhere today in Canada. The Boulet story will be told many times, not only in this country but in the world, as both parents have agreed to speak about their ordeal to help others better understand the importance of organ and tissue donations. They, by the way, fully endorse Bill C-316.

Since Logan's tragic passing, almost 100,000 Canadians have registered to become organ donors. It is clear that Logan's selfless decision to become an organ donor has made a lasting impression in this country.

Let us spin ahead to next year, April 7, 2019, which is exactly one year after the passing of Logan Boulet in the RUH hospital in Saskatoon. The Canadian Transplant Society will proclaim "wear green shirt day" in Canada. Green, of course, is the colour of the Humboldt Broncos, the team he played for in the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League. "Wear green shirt day" will be in recognition of Logan, along with many other organ donors in this country.

It is clear that the benefits organ donors provide to people in need is invaluable, and this bill would offer a simple solution that would help provide these benefits to as many Canadians as possible.

● (1840)

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House today to speak in support of C-316, an act to amend the Canada Revenue Agency Act (organ donors). I am also proud to be one of its seconders.

I want to begin by thanking and commending the member for Calgary Confederation for his work in preparing this bill and helping to do two things: one to help Parliament, the government, and Canadians who engage in an important conversation about organ donating; and also to suggest a way to improve the lives of people so that more people can inherit that gift of life through organ transplants.

This is no less than a matter of life and death. As a United Church of Canada minister, I have had the privilege of helping families in the most difficult times of their lives. Those times have involved people who have lost loved ones, often tragically and unexpectedly, who were searching for solace and meaning in the face of often unspeakable grief. I have also worked with individuals who were waiting for life-saving, or life improving, surgery that involved receiving an organ or tissue from either a living person or one who had just died, but whose organs could go on living in their body, giving them a second chance at living a full life.

I do have a bias on this topic. I am unabashedly in favour of finding ways to open the conversation about organ donation and finding ways to make it as easy as possible for this to happen across our country.

An organ donation is called the gift of life. However, for me there are two gifts happening simultaneously. One, obviously for the recipient, whose life may be well saved by the donation, but also another, the gift for the donor and their family. In my experience, the donor and his or her family often receive as much, or even more, benefit from the organ donation. For the family, it often helps to make sense and give meaning in the midst of a tragic loss.

I was 11 years old when Dr. Christiaan Barnard performed the world's first human-to-human heart transplant in Cape Town, South Africa. I can still remember watching the news that night and being absolutely overwhelmed at that possibility. He transplanted the heart of Denise Darvall, who had died from a head injury, into the chest of Louis Washkansky. While he only lived for 18 days following the surgery, he regained consciousness and taught his medical team important lessons about the immune system and anti-rejection drugs. The second patient, whose transplant happened 50 years ago this year, lived for nineteen months, and opened up the possibility for heart patients around the world to have hope for a healthy, happy, full and long life.

We have come a long way since then. Modern medicine now allows for transplantation of organs including the heart, kidneys, liver, lungs, pancreas, intestine, skin and thymus. Tissues that may be transplanted include bones, tendons, muscles, corneas, heart valves and veins. Medicine continues to grow and offer life-changing opportunities for people suffering from many afflictions. To change lives, it takes the willingness of people to donate their organs or tissue, and it takes systems that facilitate that in the most humane and efficient ways possible.

This bill quite simply would amend the Canada Revenue Agency Act to authorize the Canada Revenue Agency to enter into an agreement with a province or a territory regarding the collection and disclosure of information required for establishing or maintaining an organ donor registry in that province or territory.

During the other speeches I double-checked my own status. I first checked my Ontario licence to see if I was a donor, and it was not there. Then I checked my health card, only because I was prompted when I got to the website for the Ontario government. It is not an easy process. An easier process is to check a box when we are filing our income tax return. It is not difficult.

Our government recognizes the value of organ and tissue donation and transplantation, establishing leading practices, strengthening professional education and raising awareness. We have invested money with Canadian Blood Services and in research as well, but more can be done. This is quite a simple way to expand the gift of life, to get better health outcomes. I encourage all members to support sending this bill to committee, where it can be both studied and perhaps even improved.

My hope is that the committee will recognize that provinces and territories could use help to register consent for organ and tissue donation, especially organ and tissue donation after death, post-mortem, at a time when it is easy to do. Believe it or not, doing taxes is not that hard. It is not that stressful.

● (1845)

People can take that moment when they are filing their taxes and take just a second to check the box and do it. However, being the kind of person I am, I want to push even a bit further to ask whether that is the only place the federal government can help. Perhaps the committee could consider in all respects where Service Canada encounters Canadians, such as when people get a passport, which is surely less stressful than filing income taxes. The committee has some work to do on this bill. I support it fully and I suspect that we will be able to find a way for the federal government to efficiently and humanely help people make this decision in a timely way.

Ensuring that we register advance directives is critical. It is one way to relieve the pressure on a family. In an emergency room when a family is dealing with a life-and-death situation when someone has been brought in after a car accident and the family is told at that moment that the person they perhaps loved the most in the world is dead or is about to die, and they are being asked to give permission for organ donation, it is a confusing time. As a pastor, I have often stepped in to help families when physicians or nurses are trying to remain neutral. My job as a pastor is to help them deal with that death, and I know that one way to deal with it is to make sure that life comes out of darkness and death. That is the way we can do it, by helping a family. If we can avoid having to do it at that time of urgent care in a hospital when someone has died and someone else is facing a tragic decision, then we should do it. It is a matter of life and death and we have the power. We do not often, in the House, get to save lives. We are not first responders. In this bill, we have a chance to save lives and we should take it. Ensuring that there is a safe, good, efficient way to register advance directives is part of our mandate as members of this House of Commons, and this bill would accomplish that.

We all have stories about this. A couple of years ago, I read a story that came out of a school shooting during a wave of violence. This particular story happened in Paducah, Kentucky. Several children died in a school shooting. Afterward, a reporter asked the mother of one of the little girls who had been shot what her thoughts had been as she raced to the hospital. She said she kept praying over and over again, "Lord, let my daughter live." The reporter continued, "What happened when you found out that your daughter was dead?" The mother responded, "I started praying they would be able to use her organs so that others could live." Indeed, that came about. What happened was that this little girl's heart was given to a man who desperately needed a transplant. Months later, the mother went to see him. She was introduced to the man and asked for one thing: Could she put her head against his chest to hear her daughter's heart beating again? This act was a gift to both families. It was a gift to a mother who had lost a daughter and a gift to a man who had new life: a little girl's heart beating and beating and beating.

In the House, we have a chance to make that kind of a difference. We can send this bill to committee, we can make sure it gets passed and we can save a life.

● (1850)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo. I want to inform the hon. member that she has approximately three and a half minutes.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, three and a half minutes is a very short time to express my support for this private member's bill. I want to congratulate the member for Calgary Confederation for a very elegant and simple solution to a significant problem in Canada.

His proposed solution is when people do their tax returns, they have the ability to make decisions on organ donation and that information is then transferred to the registries of the provinces and territories.

Especially with the electronic forms that are done nowadays or when people give the information to their accountant, it is a quick and very simple question to answer, and a very important question. It prods people to make that decision and to look at that this every year.

I know there is an issue with people who are not taxpayers. We know some people perhaps do not pay taxes, but still fill in the forms for the child benefit program, for example. Not only do taxpayers fill out the forms, but other people do so regularly, often from at a your age, in order to get the child tax benefits or to look for summer employment. Again, I congratulate the member on this elegant solution.

The member also noted, quite rightly, that it would not be a big burden on the Canada Revenue Agency. It already has significant infrastructure in place to move information back and forth between the federal government and the provinces.

We have heard a lot of heartfelt stories. I have listened to the debate tonight. I think we all have someone in our lives who we know has been impacted.

I spent many years in a nursing career in a rural community. I can remember both sides, the donor and the donor recipient. Dealing with patients over the years, I can certainly remember clearly when people would come in and their loved one were not going to make it. We had to have these awful conversations with family members on what their loved ones' wishes were. We wanted to ensure their wishes were acknowledged. Also, in the rural community, we wanted to ensure we got the patient transported to take care of their wishes.

Too often, family members said that they had never had the conversation. Having it on the tax forms would make it easier. Hopefully there will be a way for the provinces to flag it for these small rural centres and other places throughout the province. Then they will know whether loved ones have indicated they want to be organ donors. We would then be able to have those conversations with the families.

I can remember one young girl who had kidney disease. I remember how long she had to wait for a donor to come forward. She was very young. She suffered greatly. We saw her through many months of difficulties as she waited patiently for an organ donor.

I congratulate the member on this elegant solution. I hope we get the support from all members in the House to move this private member's bill forward.

● (1855)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am here because in the spring I asked about the 18,000 low-income seniors, largely in Atlantic Canada who did their job, filed their taxes on time and expected that the government would do its job and make sure they would receive their GIS on time. This did not happen. Many seniors were left without their guaranteed income supplement and struggled to come up with the money they did not have to pay for things like rent, medication and food.

The response from the Minister of National Revenue was that their government was "improving the services provided by the Canada Revenue Agency to make it easier for Canadians to file their taxes and give them access to the benefits they are entitled to". Obviously, that did not work. The result was 18,000 seniors were seriously delayed in getting their GIS payment.

As a spokesperson on seniors issues for the NDP, I am regularly disappointed at how often it feels I am explaining poverty to the government. These are real issues, with real people behind them. These are seniors calling my office because they did not get their GIS and they are scared they will have to tell their landlord that they cannot pay the rent. These are men and women in their 80s and 90s facing homelessness because the government cannot get the services running smoothly.

It is important that we take a moment to thank the amazing people in the public sector who are doing their jobs every day, doing the best that they can for Canadians. I have to point out, though, it is the government's job to work with these hard-working people and identify where the gaps are so these incidents do not happen.

I am thinking of my own constituents. For example, an elderly man of 70 came to see us because he received a significantly lower amount of OAS and did not receive his guaranteed income supplement. Upon looking into his case we realized he had not filled in his 2016 tax return. He told our office that he had moved and did not have the T4s that were necessary. What we uncovered was that in fact he had moved to a seniors housing facility. He had significant health issues that made him unable to come into the office to sign the required form for CRA and Service Canada. My amazing staff did their work, and they went to his home. It was absolutely heartbreaking. He was in a very small room, with a bed that he also used as a couch. There was a tiny kitchen attached to his living area and a bathroom. He was very grateful for having that home. The reality was that this facility did not have a common area that provided meals, so he was eating very little, as he had extremely limited income.

It took us a few months to get it all sorted out for him, but during that time he could not afford to buy his medication. Costs, like food costs, were also beyond his means. Thankfully, the facility he lived in was very flexible with him about payment for the rent.

I also think of another senior in Powell River, whose GIS is on hold while CRA figures out what his new combined income is going to be now that his wife is going off disability and is retiring on CPP and OAS. He has not received a GIS cheque since last May, which is causing him concern. Right now, we are just ending summer, and he talked to us about how he is feeding himself with a small garden. He asked, "How long do they expect us to wait? Even our diet is being compromised right now, and if we didn't have a garden we wouldn't be eating very well. Does the government not realize that those few hundreds of dollars a month mean a lot to seniors on a fixed income?"

Withholding money from seniors who are eligible for GIS is terrible. As people age, we must make sure that the most vulnerable get the services they need. When will these services be fast-tracked so that the most vulnerable do not go hungry or without medication?

● (1900)

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for raising this important question.

Before I begin my prepared remarks, I would like to share that, growing up in rural Atlantic Canada, I never fully appreciated the plight of seniors living in poverty until I went knocking on doors in the 2015 election campaign. Therefore, I can say it was a very proud moment for me when I saw the implementation of our commitment to boost the guaranteed income supplement by 10% for low-income single seniors, who have seen an increase of up to $947 in places like Pictou County, Nova Scotia.

I am happy to share with the hon. member that our government is committed to making it easier for Canadians to file their taxes and to ensure that they are receiving the benefits to which they are entitled. We all know how stressful the end of the tax year can be. Often times we are scrambling to get documents together, and the government should do anything that it can to make this process easier for Canadians. For example, providing the income tax information for the given year to Service Canada for seniors who receive the GIS is a task we understand to be of the utmost importance.

To provide some background on the administration of the guaranteed income supplement, it is a program that is managed by Service Canada. The CRA works closely with Service Canada to ensure that seniors have the income information they require to assess whether they qualify for the benefit. Each year, because of changes to an individual's tax situation or information not received by the federal government, some individuals who were entitled to benefits the previous year may not receive them. We are aware of the importance of the timelines for delivery of this information and it is not a responsibility that we take lightly. I agree wholeheartedly with my colleague about the importance of processing returns quickly so that eligible seniors continue to receive the GIS, and in a timely way.

The CRA has implemented changes to ensure GIS recipients have their returns assessed in time for benefit calculations and issuance if they have filed on time. Specifically, the CRA has created a tracking process during peak filing season that will identify GIS-eligible files, ensure their returns are processed in priority, and inform Canadians of the importance of filing on time by including information on the cover page of the T1 guide, with online content and social media messaging. It is also important to note that 95% of the GIS beneficiaries have their benefits renewed automatically each year by Service Canada, as is determined by a person's income details.

I am sure we all agree that it is of great concern to CRA when a person who is entitled to a benefit does not receive it. Like my colleague, I have a great concern for the well-being of seniors who depend on these benefits.

It is important to note that there is an established protocol in place for seniors to get in touch with Service Canada should they be concerned about the timely delivery of their GIS benefits. It is especially important that, as a part of our duties as elected officials, we share information with Canadians on how to get the information they need to answer important questions like these. In the case of the GIS, there are several toll-free lines available to Canadians so their questions can be answered and their situations sorted out.

I am confident that we all have the same priorities in mind when it comes to making sure that benefits reach vulnerable Canadians who qualify for them in a dependable and timely matter.

As an Atlantic Canadian, I know first-hand what it is like to see seniors living in poverty in our constituency, and I am going to work as hard as I can in this role to ensure that our seniors who are entitled to GIS benefits receive them, and in a timely way.

● (1905)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I want to point out the fact that it was 18,000 seniors in Atlantic Canada who had to wait. I also want to point out again, when I look at the story that I just shared, that this family has been waiting since May to find out what is going to happen with their GIS. The garden is not going to be supplying food through the winter. Therefore, these are real issues where people are having to wait.

I understand that this member has some experience. I am really happy to hear he knocked on doors and heard those serious concerns from Canadians. However, when I have people in their 80s and 90s calling my office because they have lost their GIS for one reason or another, I have to ask myself this. What kind of income does the Liberal government think that 80-year-old or 90-year-old people would be getting that would take them off the GIS? What if a senior is really ill and cannot file his or her taxes in a timely fashion because he or she is in the hospital? It seems really scary to me to have weeping seniors asking if they are going to be kicked out of their home.

Therefore, I encourage this member to really look at this file. I understand that it is not his. However—

Mr. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I would again like to thank the hon. member for raising the important issue of seniors poverty and the timely delivery of GIS benefits.

As I mentioned, it is heartbreaking to speak to seniors living in poverty. We know that seniors poverty has a disproportionate impact on women as well, which is why the government's measures to increase the GIS by 10% for low-income single seniors is going to have a positive impact on senior women who are living in poverty no matter which region of Canada they are from.

I would point out again that 95% of GIS beneficiaries have their benefits renewed automatically each year by Service Canada, which is determined by a person's income details.

There is a process in place so that seniors can get in touch with Service Canada should they be concerned about receiving the GIS, and I encourage them to do so. I encourage all members in this House to educate their constituents on how to do so.

The CRA is going to continue to provide quality service to Canadians so that they can receive their benefits as quickly as possible.

This is important and we need to get this right.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada marks Gender Equality Week this week.

From the New Democrats' perspective and women in the grassroots movement, women continue to bear the brunt of successive failures by both Conservative and now Liberal governments to invest properly in women's true equality, the programs that would combat the inequality that they face.

Women would have more to celebrate this week if the government, with its very strong mandate from the people and very strong intentions and declarations of gender equality, had actually acted on that mandate to implement.

I am going to focus today particularly on ending violence against women. Canada made a commitment to the United Nations, and I am very proud that our country stood up with other countries, saying that yes, we will use our power to end violence against women and we will enact a national action plan to end violence against women. However, the government has not enacted a national action plan. It has a federal plan which is much more narrow.

What happens within the United Nations system is there are visits every five years by the United Nations representatives to find out whether Canada or any country that has signed on to a UN declaration or treaty is actually upholding its commitments.

In April of this year, Canada had its visit from the UN special rapporteur to end violence against women. She was only in Canada for 13 days, but she visited such an array of regions of the country and talked to such a variety of strong grassroots women's groups and front-line workers who gave her fantastic advice.

She summed up the ways that Canada has failed. First, violence against women in Canada is still a serious, pervasive and systemic problem, unfinished business that requires urgent actions. Second, women's human rights in Canada are protected in an incomplete, patchwork way. Third, federalism should not be a barrier to human rights implementation.

I had this debate in the House with the Prime Minister which was the impetus for this further debate today. He said that I should not be so judgmental and that I should recognize that Canada is having conversations at the United Nations among other partners. This is the root of the problem. The conversations do not actually enact real change for women on the ground.

The New Democrats are going to continue to press this in the most constructive way we can. Please, let us get on with the implementation. The talk is over. We know everyone would benefit from achieving gender equality. We know it is the right thing to do, but it cannot just be the celebratory stuff and it cannot just be conversations.

The national action plan to end violence against women, as I noted, is one of the failures. There is a dire shortage of shelters for women and children escaping violence. There is a lack of sustainable funding for a sufficient number of safe and confidential shelters. There is inconsistency in policy and legislation across all jurisdictions in order to promptly address sexual violence on campuses and in schools.

It is a damning report from the UN special rapporteur. What has the government done since April to put the UN special rapporteur's mind at ease?

● (1910)

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to thank the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith for her contribution not only to the debate tonight but for her advocacy on behalf of women. I had the pleasure of sitting with her on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women for my first few years as a member of Parliament. I thoroughly enjoyed her thoughtful and engaging approach to our dialogue.

I am similarly pleased to defend and highlight our government's action, not just words, on gender equality and the work we are doing, in particular, to end violence against women and girls. I am especially proud to rise today during the first-ever Gender Equality Week, a week to celebrate Canada's progress in advancing gender equality and an opportunity to reflect on the work that remains, recognizing the countless benefits of gender equality for people, no matter their gender.

Frankly, I have a hard time disagreeing with some of the issues the member raised in her speech, although I do take issue with her mischaracterization of the actions our government has taken. By taking steps to advance gender equality, we are strengthening the middle class and growing the economy for everyone. We could add $150 billion to our GDP in less than a decade if we successfully brought in policies of fairness and equality.

I am glad the member made reference, in particular, to the visit of the UN special rapporteur on violence against women in her question. Before I speak to the many actions our government is taking, I would like to quote the special rapporteur, who said:

> I would like...to congratulate the Canadian Government on its current efforts of upgrading the Federal Agency on the Status of Women into a full-size department, which I see as an important step that will enable better coordination and alignment of laws and policies and better implementation...in relation to the protection of women's rights...across the country, in order to fully integrate national feminist policy at all levels,...with the participation of all stakeholders, including indigenous women who today face intersectional discrimination and violence at a higher level than non-indigenous women, and therefore require specific attention and focus.

Further, the special rapporteur went on to say:

> This development, together with the new Strategy to prevent and address Gender based violence [as an obstacle to achieving gender equality], are important steps that are needed to respond to current challenges in the prevention of gender-based violence in Canada.

We are making gender equality a priority in a number of ways. For example, we have made Status of Women a full department and introduced legislation to ensure that gender-based analysis plus is applied to all federal budgets. We have invested $40 billion in a national housing strategy, 25% of which is reserved for homes for women and their families. We have invested $7 billion to address early learning and child care needs. We have strengthened the Canada child benefit so that it continues to help families most in need, in particular households with single parents. We have created a new parental sharing benefit to support an equitable distribution of child care within the home. We have created safer work environments by ensuring that all federally regulated workplaces are free of sexual harassment and violence, and we will be introducing historic proactive pay equity legislation and pay transparency measures to end pay discrimination.

We all need to work together to prevent gender-based violence. That is why the Minister of Status of Women launched the first-ever federal strategy to prevent and address gender-based violence. Gender-based violence cannot be tolerated in Canada in 2018, and we are going to continue to work with all Canadians to end gender-based violence in all its forms.

● (1915)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, the good intentions of the government aside, the ministry of Status of Women and strategies and budget announcements do not change women's lives on the ground. Although the UN report does laud some of those initiatives, that is not where the rubber hits the road as far as ending violence against women.

I will read another quote from the rapporteur's report:

> Due to the lack of shelters or second-stage housing facilities, many women who have fled from domestic violence are subsequently forced to return to their homes exposing themselves to the risk of facing further violence.

In my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith, that is Samaritan House, which is operated by the Island Crisis Care Society. It is a homeless shelter for women. Fifty per cent of its clientele is over the age of 50 now, and it turns people away every night. It is not safe. The government must act.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, in response, I would reiterate that the words we have put forward and the announcements we have made are not restricted to the paper they are written on. People are feeling the impact of the investments we have made today. I can look at projects in my own riding. If I look at the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre that has benefited from investments, it is actually helping them get into schools to create policies that are going to help reduce gender-based violence by educating young men and boys in communities today.

I outlined measures in my remarks earlier. Each have projects across the country, in every pocket of Canada, that are actually making a difference in the lives of women. I will not stand here today and say that everything is perfect in Canada. We have 150 years of a history when we should have been doing more but did not. I am so proud to be part of a government that is finally taking gender equality seriously, in particular the announcement of $100 million for a gender-based violence strategy in our federal budget. This is a record I am proud to stand on and defend, and I thank the hon. member for her many contributions on the committee that we sat on together.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni is not present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given. Accordingly, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

[*Translation*]

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:17 p.m.)

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